



ON THE ROAD WITH
FRANKIE BALLARD

KELLIE PICKLER GETS
REAL IN NEW TV SHOW

NASH NEXT
ARTIST
SPOTLIGHT
OLD
DOMINION

NASH Country Weekly

COUNTRY FOR LIFE | NOVEMBER 9, 2015

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

MIRANDA LAMBERT
LEADS
AN ALL-
FEMALE
PARTY
ON THE
ROAD

LADIES NIGHT

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COOKING!**
**KIMBERLY
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SIMPLY FRIED
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ROLLS
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2003 WEDNESDAY,
NOV. 5



Remembering Johnny

The legendary Man in Black—**JOHNNY CASH**—was the man of the hour at the 37th Annual CMA Awards show, Nov. 5, 2003, at the Grand Ole Opry House in Nashville. Johnny had died on Sept. 12, only weeks before the awards telecast. Fittingly, the show set aside one segment to pay tribute to one of country's true pioneers. **WILLIE NELSON** led off the salute with "I Walk the Line," followed by **HANK WILLIAMS JR.** reprising "Ring of Fire." The tribute also featured **TRAVIS TRITT** and **SHERYL CROW** on the duet "Jackson," made famous by Johnny and his wife, June Carter Cash. Johnny was also a big winner that night, honored posthumously with three awards: Album of the Year for *American IV: The Man Comes Around* along with Single and Music Video of the Year for "Hurt." **ALAN JACKSON** took home three trophies, including Entertainer of the Year, but the night clearly belonged to the unforgettable Johnny Cash.

2015

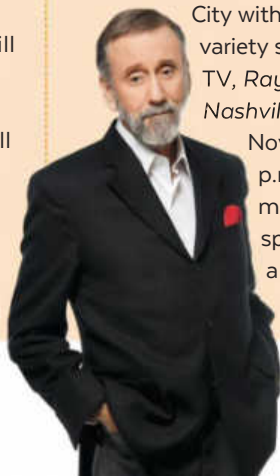
NOV. 3: MIGHTY MAC

The multitalented **MAC DAVIS** will be honored as a BMI Icon at the BMI Country Awards in Nashville on Nov. 3. Mac will be saluted for his versatile career as a songwriter, performer and actor.



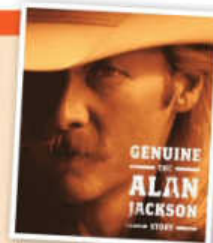
NOV. 7: RAY OF SUNSHINE

All-around entertainer **RAY STEVENS** puts the spotlight squarely on Music City with his new talk/variety show on RFD-TV, *Ray Stevens' Nashville*, premiering Nov. 7 at 8:30 p.m. ET. Look for music, comedy, special guests and a few surprises each week.



NOV. 5: TRIPLE PLAY

Be sure to snag a copy of the new three-CD set from **ALAN JACKSON**, *Genuine: The Alan Jackson Story*, which drops on Nov. 5. The album covers all phases of Alan's career with 59 recordings, including eight previously unreleased tracks. Of course, you'll get all the big hits as well, such as "Here in the Real World," "Don't Rock the Jukebox" and many others.



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Country’s most awarded band keeps on rolling with its first album in nearly 15 years and some live concerts on the docket.

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MIRANDA LAMBERT continues to blaze new trails with her latest tour, which features an all-female supporting cast. Miranda talks about the groundbreaking effort during a tour stop in Huntsville, Ala.



PLUS!



27 OLD DOMINION

This is not a typical country band, as evidenced by its first full-length album, *Meat and Candy*. Find out what’s making the “Break Up With Him” group click with fans.



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I LOVE *Kellie
Pickler*

NEW SERIES
THU NOV 5
10/9c CMT
#ILoveKP

FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Readers,

So they finally let me out of the office, and with that time I took a trek with our managing editor, Jon Freeman, to Huntsville, Ala., where we got to spend some time with Miranda Lambert and her Roadside Bars and Pink Guitars tourmates RaeLynn, Clare Dunn and Courtney Cole. We sat down with Miranda to talk about why she wanted to show support for the ladies by doing an all-female tour. And we also spoke with Ran's trio of opening acts about their feelings on the women of country and the support and exposure they are getting from Miranda on the tour. So check out our cover story for an inside look at the Roadside Bars and Pink Guitars Tour.

In the Nash Next section, we

catch up with the guys from Old Dominion. We talk songwriting and the band's humor-fueled dynamic, and learn firsthand what jokers these dudes really are. The guys also share some stories about their summer run with Kenny Chesney on his Big Revival Tour. Have a look at our Nash Next section and get to know more about the guys from this fast-rising new band.

Don't miss next week's issue, on stands Nov. 6, when we get personal with Tim McGraw and reveal *Nash Country Weekly's* Sexiest Men of Country.

SEE YOU NEXT WEEK!



LISA KONICKI,
EDITOR IN CHIEF



(From left) Courtney Cole, RaeLynn, Lisa Konicki, Miranda Lambert, Clare Dunn

FROM THE READER



Shoot us an email, a comment or a tweet and let us know what you think!

Letters, Nash Country Weekly, 506 2nd. Ave. South, Suite 200, Nashville, TN 37210

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Please include your name, address and daytime phone number with all correspondence. Nash Country Weekly assumes no responsibility for returning unsolicited material, including, but not limited to, photographs, artwork, manuscripts and letters. Letters may be edited for clarity and length.

STAMP OF APPROVAL

Thank you for mentioning the great Woody Guthrie in your recent story about the Turnpike Troubadours. Years

ago, I designed a postage stamp honoring Woody. Although they eventually selected someone else's design, I received a nice complimentary note

from Woody's close friend, the late Pete Seeger.

NATHAN WISE | Old Saybrook, Conn.

HE'S BACK, BY GEORGE

Glad to hear that King George is back [*Return of the King*, Oct. 26]. The new CD is cool. Welcome back, George. Hope to see ya in Vegas.

POLLY ULLRICH | Altoona, Pa.

TWITTER

Love reading about @coleswindell in @countryweekly! His live shows are amazing! Met him a few times & he's as nice as you'd expect. #RealDeal
NICOLE H | @nlghills

@countryweekly @coleswindell I love Cole music, I play Cole music 24/7. I am a huge fan of Cole, my favorite song is "Let Me See Ya Girl." I love Cole.
PATTY HICKEY | @pattyhickey2014

This is why @chuckwicksmusic should win @countryweekly country's sexiest man... just look at him all at ease w/ Lonestar & his guitar.

LISA-MARIE | @LISAMARIE4NKOTB

Thank you @countryweekly for FOUR great articles in 4 weeks leading up to @countrymusichof.
THE OAK RIDGE BOYS | @oakridgeboys

Look whose daddy is featured in this week's @countryweekly. Yep, it's mine!!
@joebonsall
JENNIFER STEVENS | @sloanlynn

FACEBOOK

Jamey Johnson is the sexiest man in country music.

APRIL COTTRILL FLOWERS

Alan Jackson is the sexiest man!!! You got my vote 100 percent right now!!!
ANNETTE HARTMAN

Oh, *Country Weekly*, how us fans wish y'all would let us fans vote once a day, and then fix it to where we can vote all day long on the last day of voting until the last possible minute or even second!!!

SABRINA CLARK

Awesome song and video [by Sarah Ross], love it!
LINDA FRANCHINA

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**NASH Country
Weekly**

COUNTRY FOR LIFE

FIRST TAKE

GIRLS' NIGHT OUT

The Judds—Wynonna (left) and Naomi—show up for their recent run of Las Vegas reunion shows, delivered in a '57 Chevy every bit as classic as the string of 1980s hits they reprised onstage at The Venetian Theatre.

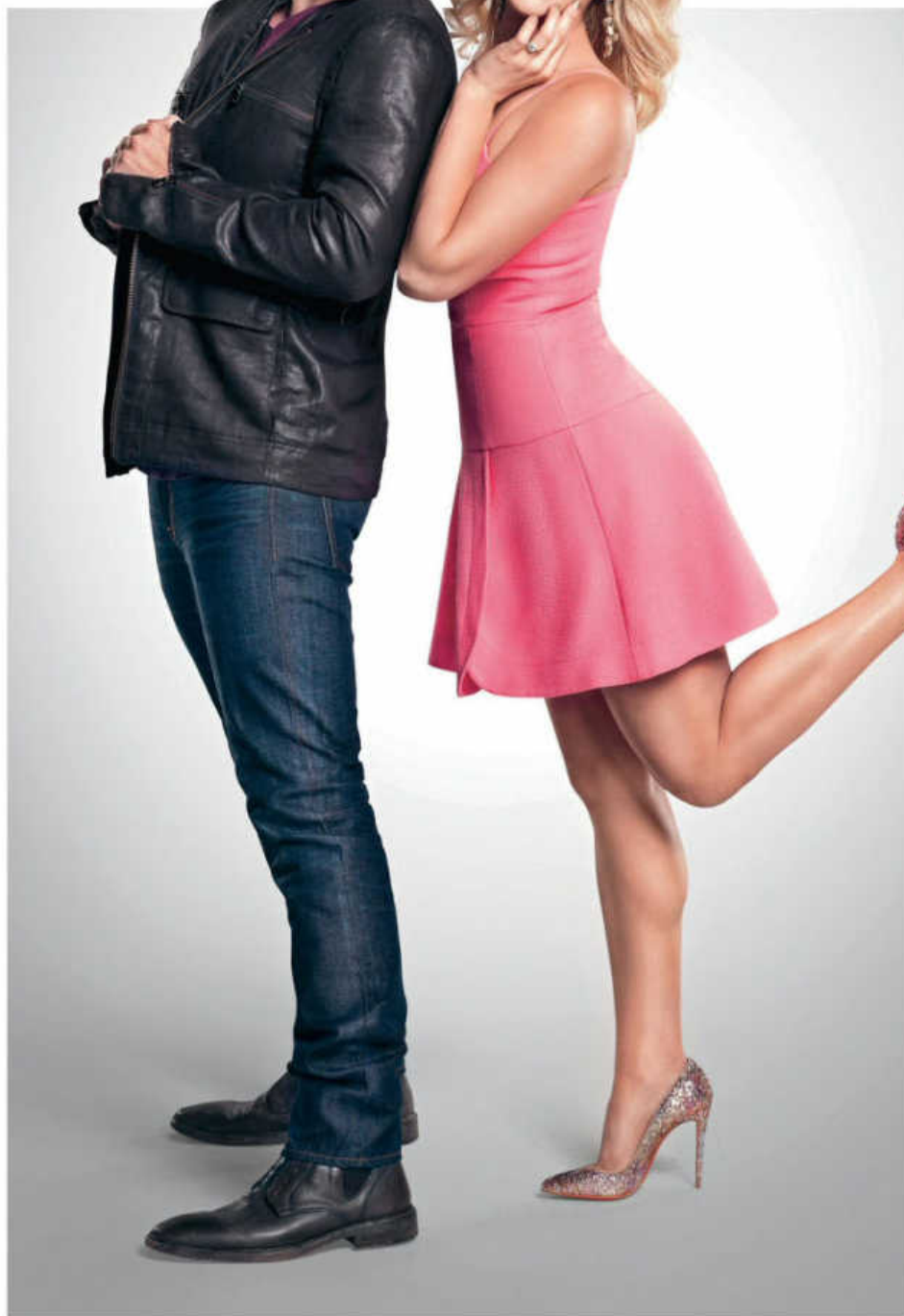




THE COUNTRY BREW

A SWEET TASTE OF COUNTRY

Opening Act



SPREAD THE LOVE

KELLIE PICKLER will return to reality television on Nov. 5 in her new CMT show, *I Love Kellie Pickler*. The former *American Idol* star's fresh foray into reality TV will give viewers a behind-the-scenes glimpse into her home life with songwriting husband Kyle Jacobs as well as showcase aspects of her singing career. The series also reunites Kellie with *Idol* host Ryan Seacrest, who serves as the show's producer.

photo: courtesy CMT

(Left) **FARM FRESH** Willie Nelson and Mavis Staples share a laugh during the 30th annual Farm Aid benefit concert; (below) **TV TIME** Joey+Rory chat with gospel legend Bill Gaither during the taping of a television special that will air in the spring.



IT MAKES US HAPPY Sheryl Crow (right) makes a surprise appearance during Kacey Musgraves' show at Nashville's Ryman Auditorium for a duet version of her 1996 hit "If It Makes You Happy."

CRISS-KRAUSS Singer/songwriter/musical virtuoso Alison Krauss (right) joins Taylor Swift onstage in Nashville during a September stop on her 1989 World Tour.



(Clockwise from above) **CUP RUNNETH OVER** Eric Church gets his hands on the Women's World Cup trophy with U.S. soccer players (from left) Julie Johnston, Carli Lloyd and Meghan Klingenberg; **KEEPING UP** Jake Owen runs into reality TV royalty Kim Kardashian on the *Ellen* show; **GOTTEN ANY TIPS?** Keith Urban hits the streets for some busking during a little downtime in Denver.



Taylor & Alison by John Shearer/Getty Images; Julie, Eric, Meghan & Carli courtesy Eric Church Twitter; Keith courtesy Keith Urban Facebook; Kim by Robin Panchant/Getty Images



NASHVILLE IN NEW YORK (from left) Justin Davis and Sarah Zimmermann of Striking Matches, Nashville's Charles Esten and singer/songwriter Kim Richey gathered in New York City in September to perform at Charles Esten in Concert.

KYLE PARK

NEW ALBUM

"THE BLUE ROOF SESSIONS"

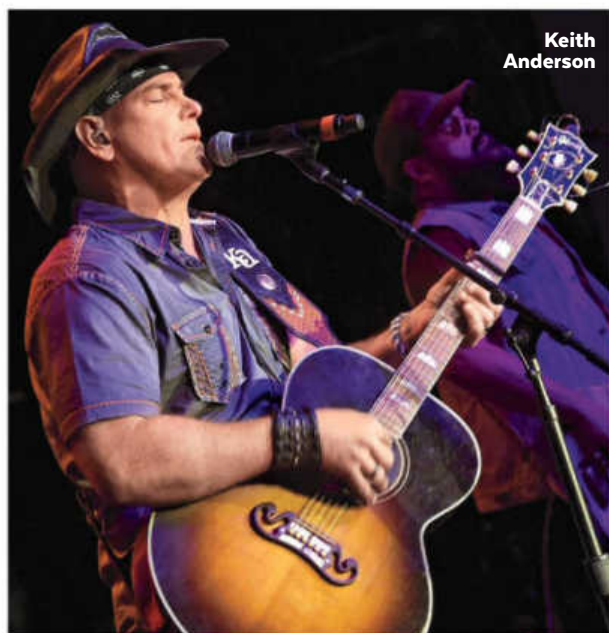
OUT NOW



(From left) Iconic Entertainment's Fletcher Foster, CAA's John Huie, Kelsea Ballerini and Billboard's Ray Waddell

Are You Not Entertained?

The International Entertainment Buyers Association, the leading trade organization for live entertainment industry professionals, held its 45th annual conference in Nashville with a star-studded awards ceremony. Clint Black received the Career Achievement Award during the ceremony, which featured performances by a bevy of stars including Scotty McCreery, Tracy Lawrence, Jennifer Nettles, Terri Clark and more.



Keith
Anderson



Jennifer
Nettles and
host Sinbad



Vince Gill
and Gretchen
Wilson



Clint Black



Ty Herndon



Terri Clark



Darryl Worley



Parmalee's Barry Knox (left) and Joshua McSwain



Mark Wills



(From left) Sinbad with Shay Mooney and Dan Smyers of Dan + Shay

WHISTLE BLOWER

DWIGHT YOAKAM and **JACK BLACK** are joining forces to executive produce *Belles & Whistles*, a new Fox comedy written by Alex McAulay (*Eastbound and Down*) that centers on an unfulfilled father who gets fired from his Silicon Valley tech job and decides to move his dysfunctional family to Nashville to pursue his dream of country stardom. No word yet on whether Dwight or Jack will star in the series, but they've both got the acting—and singing—chops to carry the 30-minute sitcom that will reportedly feature a musical performance element.



ONCE UPON A SCOTTY...

As if writing songs, making records and going on tour aren't enough, **SCOTTY MCCREERY** has added "author" to his résumé. Next May, the former *American Idol* winner will debut his book, titled *Go Big or Go Home: The Journey Toward the Dream*. According to his website, the book is a narrative spanning the North Carolina man's beginnings imitating Elvis on the school bus, his reign on *Idol* and his developing music career. "God gave me a voice and America gave me a chance," says Scotty. "This book is about those two things, and about the amazing journey that began the moment I decided to say two words about this show I knew and loved. 'Why not?'" Pre-orders for *Go Big or Go Home* begin Nov. 15 with details on Scotty's website.



NEWSofNOTE

IN MEMORY



BILLY JOE ROYAL, who made a successful transition from pop to country in the 1980s, died Oct. 6 at age 73 at his home in North Carolina. Billy Joe's major country hits included "Burned Like a Rocket" and his cover of "Tell It Like It Is."



HUGH WRIGHT (left), who both co-founded and played drums for the band Boy Howdy, died Sept. 25 of natural causes at age 63.

BOOKS



SAM PHILLIPS: *The Man Who Invented Rock 'n' Roll*, chronicling the career of the iconic record producer, will be released Nov. 10. Sam, a member of the Country Music Hall of Fame, founded Sun Studio in Memphis and helped launch the careers of Elvis Presley, Johnny Cash, Jerry Lee Lewis and others.

TV NEWS

CARRIE UNDERWOOD and **BRAD PAISLEY** host the biggest night in country music, The 49th annual CMA Awards, Nov. 4, broadcasting live from Nashville on ABC. **MIRANDA LAMBERT**, **ERIC CHURCH**, **HANK WILLIAMS JR.** and **THOMAS RHETT** are among the performers for the always highly-rated telecast, which kicks off at 8 p.m. ET.





WELCOME TO THE ROCK

Rock the Kasbah, a new mock-rockumentary that stars **BILL MURRAY** as a washed-up manager named Richie Lanz, opened in theaters on Oct. 23. The fictional comedy, directed by Oscar winner Barry Levinson (*Diner*, *Rain Man*), features a number of cameos from the music world, including **WILLIE NELSON**, Rolling Stones guitarist **RON WOOD** and the Grateful Dead's **BOB WEIR**.

CHAPTER TWO

After a successful run earlier this year, **VINCE GILL** and **LYLE LOVETT** recently announced plans to hit the



road together again in 2016 for the second installment of their Songs and Stories Tour. The tour kicks off Feb. 17 in Montgomery, Ala., and concludes March 1 in Coral Springs, Fla., with more than 10 dates in between. The stripped-down shows will feature

Vince and Lyle singing songs and telling stories as they sit on stools with their guitars.

FEELING SOCIAL?

Anxiously awaiting that new album from your favorite artist?

Eager to discuss the hot concert you just saw?

Connect with **NASH Country Weekly** and fellow fans online and join our community!



countryweekly



nashcountryweekly



facebook.com/countryweekly



LIGHT IN THE DARK

While British actor **TOM HIDDLESTON** is getting positive reviews for his portrayal of Hank Williams in the biopic *I Saw the Light*, the movie, in general, isn't faring as favorably in the eyes of critics. Originally scheduled to hit theaters on November 27, the movie's release has been pushed to March 25, 2016. Perhaps distributor Sony Pictures Classic didn't want the film to get lost in the shuffle of awards season. The extra few months should give Tom and the cast more time to promote the flick.

At a special premiere of the movie on Oct. 17 at Nashville's historic Belcourt Theater, Tom was joined by costars Elizabeth Olsen, Bradley Whitford, Maddie Hasson, Wrenn Schmidt and more, as well as writer/director/producer Marc Abraham. After the screening, Tom and his backing band gathered at downtown Nashville's Acme Feed & Seed for a performance that included "Hey Good Lookin'," "Long Gone Lonesome Blues" and more.



(From left) Fred Parker, Bradley Whitford, Wrenn Schmidt, Marc Abraham, Elizabeth Olsen, Tom Hiddleston, Maddie Hasson, Joshua Brady, Casey Bond, Wes Langlois and Michael Rinne

WHAT'S THAT?

"SONG PLUGGER" noun

Within each publishing company, there is a person (or persons) whose job is to get the right songs into the hands of artists, producers and the record label's A&R (artists & repertoire) staff. This person, known as the "song plugger," has a vast knowledge of the publishing company's staff writers and song catalogs, along with great relationships in the business, so when they hear that Kenny Chesney is working on a new record, they can pitch or "plug" songs that suit him. There are also independent pluggers who work with writers who own their own catalogs.





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Even if the rest of the month goes south this has been a stunning October...

Joe Bonsall
@joebonsall

good people and good manners will carry you where money can't go
ABBEY CATE CONE
@abbeycone

Fishin' Old Tampa Bay in the hellsbayboats today. Hittin the flats w/ Cpt. Nick
Tyler Farr
@tylerfarr

Here in traffic court this a.m. [a] perfect place to serve beer. That's me... always thinking of new methods of community improvement.
Ray Scott
@RoyaltyCheck

No guarantee but a new random blog may be coming in a few days that Selena Gomez's new record inspired.
David Nail
@davidnail

New @carrieunderwood record that's coming... Whoa... You gotta download this record!! Dooooo it!!
Chuck Wicks
@chuckwicksmusic

The Fairest of Them All

LITTLE BIG TOWN's **KAREN FAIRCHILD**, who has a loyal and stylish Instagram fan-following salivating over her wardrobe, has put her impeccable taste and flair for fashion to paper with her own line of clothing. "Fair Child" is described as a fusion of sexy, bold pieces inspired by her love of vintage styles and designed to create endless looks and mix-and-match possibilities. Karen says the line contains "fun, glamorous rocker pieces" that are refined for everyday wear. "Fair Child" will be available at EVine.com.



BIRTHDAYS

NOV. 6, 1932
STONEWALL JACKSON

NOV. 8, 1977
BUCKY COVINGTON

NOV. 4, 1940
DELBERT McCLINTON

NOV. 6, 1941
GUY CLARK

NOV. 8, 1994
LAUREN ALAINA



SCARY STUFF

In October, **TRAVIS TRITT** appeared on *The Haunting of...* on the Lifetime Movie Network. The one-hour episode featured the award-winning country star discussing strange occurrences that he's encountered at his lakeside cabin in the Blue Ridge Mountains. A psychic visited the house to try and uncover the paranormal history of the secluded residence. Check out mylifetime.com for info on catching the show if you missed it.



American Idol winner Nick Fradiani (left) and Idol mentor/record exec Scott Borchetta display merchandise from Nashville's Big Machine Store; (below) Maddie & Tae drop by to support the "Music Has Value" brand.

Added VALUE

"Music Has Value" started out as a message stitched onto the arm of industry executive Scott Borchetta's coat. The slogan, a declaration from the music industry executive to those who try to obtain music through free resources, is meant as a reminder that a singer/songwriter's time, effort and creativity deserve appropriate compensation. The simple social statement has now become a line of apparel and accessories designed by Scott's wife, Sandi Spika,

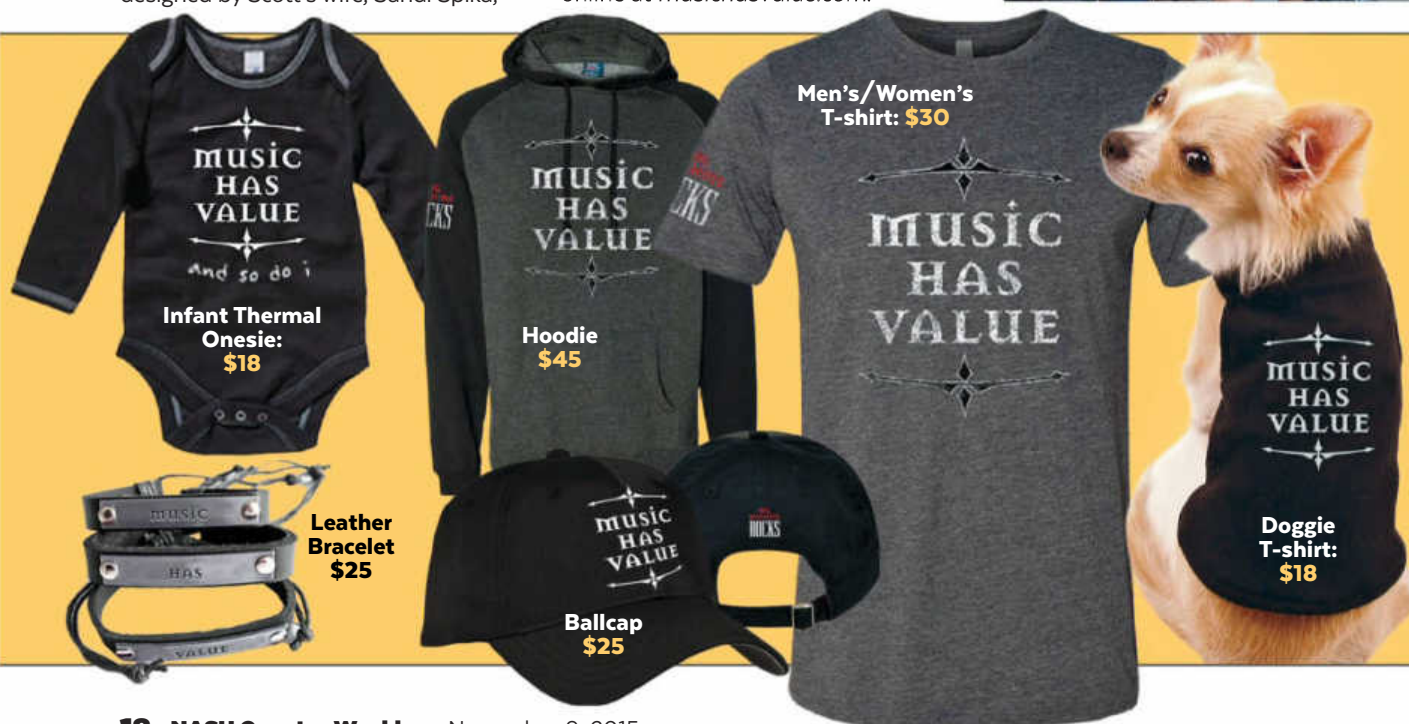
allowing anyone to voice their opinion on the importance and worth of music.

But the "Music Has Value" line has another purpose. A portion of the proceeds from all apparel and accessories sold will go toward funding school music programs.

Items are available in downtown Nashville at The Big Machine Store, which also hosts special events and songwriter's nights. You can also order online at musichasvalue.com.



photos courtesy BMLG



EVERY
NIGHT



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'CrossWing'
Style 52157



KIMBERLY'S SIMPLY FRIED CHICKEN

Makes 4 Servings

¾ cup Kosher salt, plus more to taste

One 3-to-5-pound whole chicken, cut into 8 pieces

Freshly ground black pepper

All-purpose flour for dredging

Coconut oil for deep-frying

In a large deep bowl or stockpot, **MIX** the salt in one gallon of water until the salt dissolves. **PLACE** the chicken pieces in the salted water brine. **COVER** with plastic wrap and refrigerate overnight, or at least 2 hours.

REMOVE the chicken from the brine and dry it very well with paper towels. (Discard the brine). **SEASON** the chicken with salt and pepper. **DREDGE** the chicken pieces in the flour and let them rest for 10 to 15 minutes at room temperature.

In the meantime, **HEAT** the coconut oil in a large cast-iron skillet, over medium heat, to 350°. When melted, the oil should reach halfway up the pan.

Carefully place the pieces of chicken in the hot oil. **FRY** on both sides until browned, crispy and cooked through. Internal temperature of the chicken should always be around 180°. **REMOVE** from the pan and **DRAIN** on paper towels.

Photo by Bea + Thomas Photography/Harper Co. Inc.

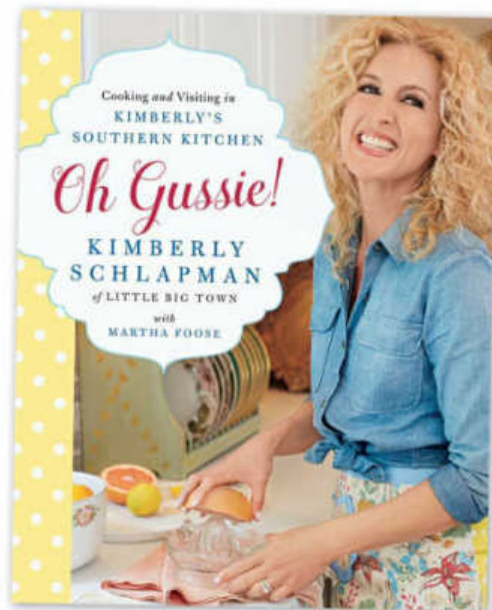
CLUCKIN' GOOD

LITTLE BIG TOWN'S KIMBERLY SCHLAPMAN HAS A SIMPLE RECIPE FOR FRIED CHICKEN YOU CAN ENJOY DURING THE CMA AWARDS—OR ANY TIME, FOR THAT MATTER.

On Nov. 4, the members of Little Big Town—Jimi Westbrook, Karen Fairchild, Kimberly Schlapman and Phillip Sweet—will find out if they've successfully defended their Country Music Association Vocal Group of the Year title. And here's a surefire winner for your CMA Awards viewing feast: Kimberly's Southern fried chicken recipe.

In Kimberly's cookbook, *Oh Gussie! Cooking and Visiting in Kimberly's Southern Kitchen*, she writes that she prefers her fried chicken without extra spices or additions. "When it comes to fried chicken," she advises, "just keep it simple with salt and black pepper." Check out her recipe right here—and enjoy the show!

BOB PAXMAN



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Albums

Chris Janson

Buy Me a Boat

WARNER BROS. NASHVILLE

A



Here's to the power of new media. Chris, a longtime inside-the-Row favorite, finally got his shot at mainstream success with "Buy Me a Boat," which became a streaming sensation and then motored its way up the charts. Now, he's released his first full-fledged album, and it's a delight. The album captures the raw energy of Chris' live performances—not an easy task if you've ever seen this human hurricane in person—with a powerhouse production that nonetheless puts Chris' distinct voice right up front in the mix. Most of the cuts are winners—in

fact, "Buy Me a Boat" isn't even the best track on the album. The slow and bluesy "White Trash" sounds like something Johnny Cash might have recorded with the Georgia Satellites. "Messin' With Jesus," featuring a guest vocal by Tim McGraw, takes a look at cleaning up one's act in a clever way. And "Right

in the Middle" is a relentless, two-and-a-half-minute sidewinder that kicks off with crunching guitars and churns right through to the end. "Save a Little Sugar," basically nothing more than watered-down Florida Georgia Line, stands as the lone misfire. Chris takes on country themes but without the smirking, pander-

ing attitude that pervades most current tunes that claim to be "country." His rough-and-tumble voice makes him a credible purveyor. As such, this is a *real* country album.

BOB PAXMAN

LONG STORY SHORT:

You won't be up the creek with *Buy Me a Boat*.



THE NCW JUKEBOX

Essential
songs for your
Veterans Day playlist.

JOHN MICHAEL MONTGOMERY
"Letters From Home"

TIM MCGRAW
"If You're Reading This"

DARRYL WORLEY
"Have You Forgotten?"

DAVID BALL
"Riding With Private Malone"

TOBY KEITH
"American Soldier"

TRACE ADKINS
"Arlington"

CHARLIE DANIELS BAND
"In America"

GEORGE JONES
"50,000 Names"

THE MONROE BROTHERS
"Forgotten Soldier Boy"

JOHNNY CASH
"Song of the Patriot"

BRUCE ROBISON
"Travelin' Soldier"

CRAIG MORGAN
"God, Country & Family"

LOOK
FOR THIS
NASH COUNTRY WEEKLY
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Old Dominion *Meat and Candy*

RCA NASHVILLE

A-



As music critics, we tend to use a lot of flowery prose and industry-speak in music reviews trying to adequately and accurately describe the sounds we hear and sensations we feel when we listen to a new song or album or go to a concert. But with Old Dominion's new record, *Meat and Candy*, well, it's just plain good.

The lineup of songs is mostly flirtatious and fun, and even the few not-so-happy-ever-after songs are incredibly addictive, boasting infectious rhythms and grooves. While

it's best to reserve the debate of what is and isn't "country" for an album that isn't so well written (completely by the band, by the way) and produced, their pop influences are apparent, especially "Nowhere Fast," which harkens back to 1988 and Tracy Chapman's "Fast Car." But it works. It really works. The combination of catchy rhymes, clever lyrics, Matt Ramsey's warm, strong and versatile voice and the band's subtle but delicious harmonies will have you singing, clapping and dancing along to every track. And a new favorite will emerge every time you listen. Maybe rappy recitations aren't your thing. And maybe neither are fiddle and steel. Old Dominion manages to land right in the middle, without being mediocre, in one of the most listenable collections of 2015.

TAMMY RAGUSA

Clint Black *On Purpose*

THIRTY TIGERS

B

Clint Black excels at a sort of musical comfort food—simple, uplifting senti-



ments baked into a sonic casserole that doesn't provoke or antagonize. That is both strength and weakness with *On Purpose*, his first full-length album in 10 years. On the plus side: Clint's positivity and humor shine through on "Better and Worse," which boasts some nifty chicken-pickin' guitar work. "Right on Time" and "Breathing Air" are sweet, breezily executed love songs that would have been hits in a bygone era, and "Beer" is worth hoisting a pint or two. Sometimes it's too much:

"Summertime Song" envisions windows down and sunshine, but its lethargic pace feels stuck in the dead of winter. "One Way to Live" and "Still Calling It News," on the other hand, attempt to make big statements about life and politics, respectively, but lose their power with too many clichés. But when Clint gets it right, as on the subtly moving final track "The Last Day," it's like Grandma's signature dish—a second helping is a must.

JON FREEMAN

The Black Lillies *Hard to Please*

ATTACK MONKEY/THIRTY TIGERS

A-

With their fourth studio album, *Hard to Please*, The Black Lillies embark on their most adventurous undertaking to date, a sonic

cornucopia of country, R&B, jazz, folk and rock that bubbles and boils with brass and strings. The 10-song offering kicks off with the swaggering, swampy R&B opener, "Hard to Please," before the haunting piano ballad, "Fade," draws the album to an ethereal close. In between, the five-piece band finds its groove on songs like "40 Days" and "Dancin'," a boot-scooter highlighted by the one-two punch of dueling vocalists Cruz Contreras and Trisha Gene Brady, while "The First Time" bustles with brass and channels Trisha's inner Natalie Merchant. Song to song, the album may lack cohesiveness, but it's the roller coaster-like ebb and flow that makes it so enjoyable.

JIM CASEY



DIVINELY DIVERSE

The Pepsi Gulf Coast Jam capped off summer with multiple flavors of country music for a family-friendly, faith-topped Florida fiesta.



Miranda Lambert



Lady Antebellum



Scotty McCreery (right)



Sam Hunt



Hunter Hayes

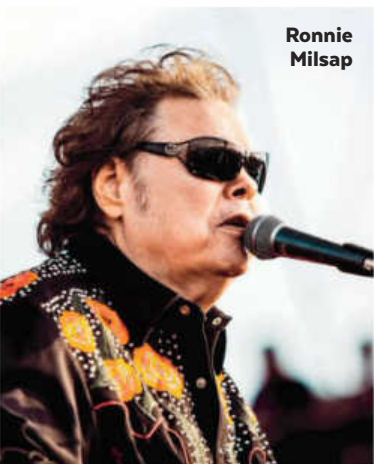
Kellie
Pickler



Keith
Urban



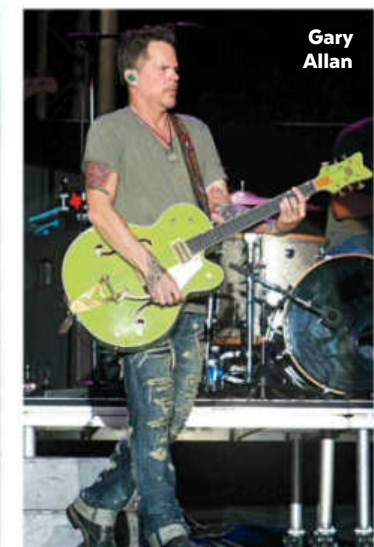
Ronnie
Milsap



Martina
McBride



Gary
Allan



THE THIRD ANNUAL PEPSI GULF COAST JAM, held on Labor Day weekend (Sept. 4–6) in Panama City Beach, Fla., drew almost 21,000 fans and featured more than a dozen stars. With a lineup that included headliners Lady Antebellum, Miranda Lambert and Keith Urban, along with performers like Scotty McCreery, Martina McBride, Gary Allan, Dwight Yoakam, Ronnie Milsap and Hunter Hayes, the family-friendly festival offered something for everyone, as the old Pepsi slogan goes.

The Jam's producer, Rendy Lovelady, handpicked each artist to ensure that everyone, from young to old, enjoyed the live music. "I've known Keith Urban and Martina McBride for years," says Rendy. "I actually sit down, I do my research, I talk to agencies, I talk to the managers and sometimes I talk to the artists themselves."

Unlike other festivals, Pepsi Gulf Coast Jam puts an emphasis on good, clean fun, including—as of this year, anyway—a prayer during each night of the festival, something Rendy says was entirely unplanned. "That was a big step," he acknowledges. "I've never done it before, and I told my partner, 'This year I'm doing it.' I'm a Christian. I'm a believer. It's everything I do and stand for. I know that half of country music [fans], if not three-fourths, are believers, and for no more than 15 seconds, we all get in one accord and pray for our country, pray for our surroundings and pray for safety."

"It felt like it was something I needed to do," he adds. "Nobody told me to do it, nobody made me do it. As a matter of fact, I worried. The first night I went up there, I was scared to death. It's not something you politically do. I did it, and when I got to the end, to 'in Jesus' name,' 20,000 people, everybody, said amen. It sounded like a Billy Graham crusade."

The prayer for safety was especially appropriate during the third and final night of the Gulf Coast Jam. A fierce thunderstorm blew in on Sunday afternoon, requiring all of the attendees, security, and staff to quickly evacuate the premises, taking shelter either in their cars or a gymnasium located on the property. Tyler Farr was forced to cancel his show, while Gary Allan's set was shortened.

"It was a fun and chaotic show," says Gary. "I was the first act back on the stage following the evacuation, and I was glad so many of the fans stayed to see us play. They were the real diehards in the crowd. I'm sorry the set was cut short, but the event staff did a great job of trying to keep everything on schedule and keep up with the weather. They obviously wanted to make sure people got the show they came for, but they put everyone's safety first. It was very well organized all around."

A first-ever spring Jam will be held April 7–9, 2016, headlined by Rascal Flatts. Although the headlining acts for next year's Pepsi Gulf Coast Jam have yet to be announced, Rendy hints that the marquee-topper will be the biggest act the festival has ever hosted.

"I'll just say, it's bigger than it was this year," he allows. "The headliner we have on hold right now is one of the biggest names in country music, and one of the hottest, coolest names in country music." **GAYLE THOMPSON**



photo by LeAnn Mueller/Sweet Talk Publicity

HOME FREE

Members

(Above, from left) **Tim Foust** (bass vocals), **Austin Brown** (lead tenor), **Rob Lundquist** (harmony tenor), **Chris Rupp** (baritone harmony), **Adam Rupp** (percussion sounds)

Current Album

Country Evolution



Why you should know them

The a cappella group, originally formed in Minnesota, won the fourth season of

the competition series *The Sing-Off* in 2013. Home Free appears on the recently released Christmas-themed album by Kenny Rogers, *Once Again It's Christmas*. Home Free brings the stirring magic of a cappella singing to the country music genre. Bass vocalist Tim Foust spoke with NCW on a variety of topics, including their reworking of The Oak Ridge Boys' classic "Elvira" recorded for Home Free's new album.

Updating "Elvira"

"Being a bass singer, I've always admired groups that featured a prominent bass. And [The Oak Ridge Boys' bass vocalist] Richard Sterban is probably the most famous bass voice in country music. You always run the risk of reworking a classic that everyone knows. We used to

be more hesitant about that sort of thing. When we were on *The Sing-Off* and they suggested that we modernize 'Ring of Fire,' we were terrified at that idea. But it got such a great response. For 'Elvira,' it helped that The Oak Ridge Boys liked our version and they sing it with us on the album."

Under the Influences

"We've always loved the great vocal groups going back to the 1950s and '60s. I have always been drawn to that harmony sound. In the country world, we have been influenced by Alabama and Rascal Flatts, acts like that. We do an Alabama medley on our new album. Alabama just had that real meaty, three-part harmony sound. There's nothing quite like it on the radio anymore."

Christmas With Kenny

"The way we got with Kenny Rogers is interesting. We were actually recommended to him by his sons' music teacher. Kenny was considering doing something a little outside the box for his Christmas album. He looked us up and liked what he heard. The song we did with him ["Children, Go Where I Send Thee"] was a lot of fun. He is one of those stars that transcends eras and is still a household name."

Group Goals

"I guess the most immediate goal is to continue growing. We're turning some heads in music so if we can continue on that trajectory, we'll be happy."

BOB PAXMAN

NASH **NEXT**

ARTIST SPOTLIGHT



NOT YOUR AVERAGE COUNTRY BAND

OLD DOMINION **CAN DO IT
ALL—FROM MAKING HITS
TO MAKING JOKES.**

BY CHRIS PARTON



As country music splits into a rainbow of subcategories to accommodate option-hungry listeners, artists are given fresh leeway to experiment and, with luck, elicit a reaction. In the midst of this momentum, one new band has discovered an intriguing niche.

With “Break Up With Him”—a grooving, half-serious attempt at winning back an already-gone ex-girlfriend—and a new debut album, *Meat and Candy*,

Old Dominion is combining the dial-up-connected diversity of ’90s pop culture with undeniable musical talent and a smirking sense of sarcasm.

On a rain-soaked fall afternoon in Nashville, the band is seated around a massive conference table near Music Row. The meeting should be all business for singer Matthew Ramsey, lead guitarist Brad Tursi, keyboardist/guitarist Trevor Rosen, bassist Geoff Sprung and drummer Whit Sellers, but they

can’t help cracking jokes. “Break Up With Him,” the band’s first major-label single, has just entered the Top 10 on *Billboard*’s country airplay chart, they just wrapped a summer’s worth of stadium gigs with Kenny Chesney and the very name of their crowning achievement so far—their first full-length effort, *Meat and Candy*—is a never-ending source of wisecracks.

Over the course of an exclusive interview with *Nash Country Weekly*,



(From left) Trevor Rosen, Matthew Ramsey, Whit Sellers, Geoff Sprung and Brad Tursi of Old Dominion perform a private concert at Joe's Pub in New York City in April.



(Above from left) Songwriters Shane McAnally, Brandy Clark and Old Dominion's Trevor Rosen join The Band Perry's Neil, Kimberly and Reid to celebrate their No. 1 song, "Better Dig Two."



(Above) The guys get into character for their recent video shoot for "Break Up With Him," which pays homage to *Back to the Future*; (below) The members of Old Dominion (front row) signed their new record deal with RCA Nashville in February.



one thing becomes crystal clear: Old Dominion is a different breed of country band.

For starters, the songwriting is kept in-house, since members have written No. 1 hits for the likes of Kenny Chesney ("Save It for a Rainy Day"), Tyler Farr ("A Guy Walks Into a Bar") and The Band Perry ("Better Dig Two"). They play on all their own recordings, too, giving each song a distinct blend of alternative-rock swagger and down-to-earth country

realism that's all their own.

But add in a penchant for laughing at the world around them (and at themselves) and the vibe starts to resemble the country equivalent of a teenaged-pop-punk band. According to Matthew, the band's friendship is the nonstop-razzing kind, and that helps lead to songs with a true-to-life blend of heartache and comedy.

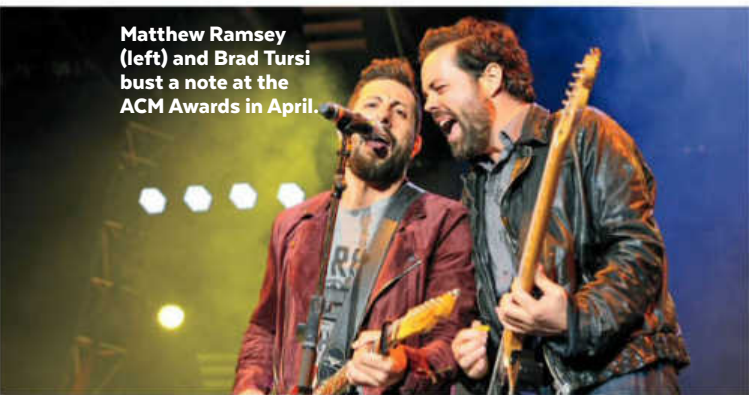
"I don't know why it would work for us as opposed to another band," he

says. "But that's a big part of why it does work for us."

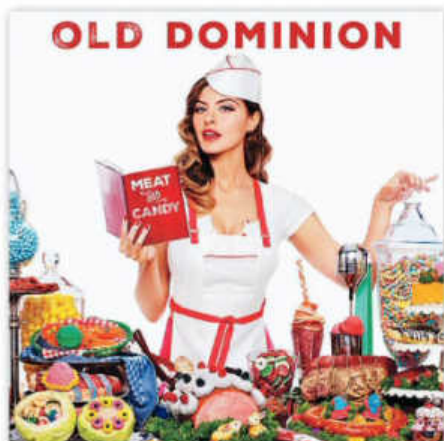
On Nov. 6, the picture comes into full view with the release of their debut album, *Meat and Candy*. Featuring infectious, radio-friendly hooks, quirky turns of phrase and an anything-and-everything approach to country's new soundscape, the entire 11-track album was co-written by members of the band.

"At this point, we're not necessarily interested in doing what we're doing

Matthew Ramsey (left) and Brad Tursi bust a note at the ACM Awards in April.



(Below) Old Dominion worked with producer Shane McNally (third from left) on their first full-length album, *Meat and Candy*, which drops on November 6.



if it's not something we created," Matthew explains. "That's not to say it's the wrong thing to do, it's just that we've spent a lot of time developing our songwriting, we do really care about it and we are obviously saying something that is different."

Old Dominion borrows its name from the nickname for Virginia, where four members have family ties. They first formed in Nashville in 2007, but the lineup wasn't complete until lead guitarist Brad came on board in 2012. Before that, each member was songwriting or playing in other bands, but suddenly a just-for-fun side project looked like it had a shot at the big time.

"None of us sat down and said 'We're gonna make a run at this,'" Geoff explains. "It was this process where it was something we did for our own enjoyment, and then it was something we did because we could make some money on the side, and then slowly it just started to consume all of our time."

Their first EP, released independently, featured the clever come-on "Shut

Me Up," but it was "Break Up With Him" that struck a chord and led to a deal with RCA Nashville. The song eventually spent six weeks at No. 1 on XM's The Highway Hot 45 Countdown, introducing fans across the nation to a group ready to challenge the boundaries of country lyrics.

"A lot of times when we're writing a song, we're just trying to make each other laugh," Matthew says. "Sometimes things like 'Break Up With Him' come out and it's like 'Why not say that? Who says you can't?'"

"We're not serious about our dirt roads," Brad says, laughing.

"I mean, we're sarcastic jerks," clarifies Matthew. "That's just all there is to it."

The song's success led to the band earning a coveted opening spot on Kenny Chesney's The Big Revival Tour this summer, testing their mettle in football stadiums all across the country. Impressed, Kenny has invited them back for next summer, too, all stemming from a witty tune written in the back seat of a van.

"It started at a soundcheck," says Trevor. "A lot of times at soundcheck when you're getting your instrument plugged in, you start noodling around. Whit starts playing a beat, Brad starts playing a riff, and usually one of us will have a phone nearby [to record on] just in case. I remember lifting up the phone and being like, 'That's cool.'"

"I don't know if it was that night or a couple of nights later, but I was on the back bench of the van still awake, and Matt popped his head up and was like 'Hey man, I was thinking about that groove we had,'" Trevor continues. "He had the idea for a one-sided phone conversation. We didn't want to wake anyone up, so he was whispering into the phone, like 'hey girl, what's up?'"

"Sometimes one just falls out," says Matthew. "I went 'I know you ain't in love with him, break up with him,' and we kind of looked at each other like 'I think that's it.'"

In the song, a character calls his ex-girlfriend and, after admitting to being a bit buzzed, tells her flat-out to ditch

A GIG LIKE NO OTHER

KENNY CHESNEY spotted the talent in OLD DOMINION early on, so the country superstar gave the fledgling group a big boost by inviting them on his massive 2015 stadium run, The Big Revival Tour. The band ended up opening 18 shows over the course of the summer and came away with some important lessons for next year, when they'll join Chesney's traveling circus once again.

"Wear shoes with treads on the bottom," jokes singer Matthew Ramsey.

"He landed on his head one show. It was rough," keyboardist/guitarist Trevor Rosen explains.

All jesting aside, it turns out performing in a stadium full of country fans is every bit as exhilarating and terrifying as you'd expect.

"A stadium is a lot different than a club," says Trevor, "so you learn a lot about song choice. You watch somebody like Chesney and all the songs he plays, and how they just resonate in a stadium. The other thing we learned is just how to be a professional. The way Kenny treats every individual on his team and crew—from top to bottom—everyone is well respected and taken care of."

"You can just tell that he does that because of the way they treat us," Matthew adds. "We're just this rinky-dink

little band that gets to play for 20 minutes. We're the first of five opening acts, but you couldn't drop something without somebody running over and picking it up for you."

Matthew and lead guitarist Brad Tursi (along with Andrew Dorff) co-wrote Kenny's latest No. 1, "Save It for a Rainy Day," so Kenny started bringing the Old Dominion guys onstage for unbelievable, stadium-wide singalongs as the tour wound down. But the band didn't truly realize what they had been a part of until they got home.

"Now, here we are watching football," Matthew says with a laugh, "and every time we're going, 'Yup, played that stadium.'"



her new man. Despite the blunt message, it's not aggressive in the slightest—more like comic, as the plan is obviously a long shot and probably won't fly. It's all backed by a woozy, easygoing sound that completes the scene: a tin-can piano, throaty vocals and a guitar that slumps in mock defeat.

So far, it's the only time all five members of the band have written something together, and, like the rest of the album, it was produced by Shane McAnally, one of Nashville's most adventurous songwriter/producers. Shane's current credits range from the Texas twang of Kacey Musgraves' *Pageant Material* to the urban flow of Sam Hunt's *Montevallo*.

"We all listen to everything, we're not just country fans or rock fans," Matthew says. "And I think you ultimately just become a product of that. I'm still a huge fan of Pearl Jam. I feel like artists are listening to everything now, but more importantly, everyone is."

Almost all of the tracks on *Meat and Candy* seem influenced by genres that

played a big part in the '90s music scene, from the industrial-rock underbelly of "Wrong Turns" and the adult-contemporary feel of "Crazy Beautiful Sexy" to the Caribbean-inflected, island-pop breeze blowing behind "Said Nobody."

Another clever concept based on a wisecrack between friends, the song features a rundown of mood-killers like *I just want to turn in early, I don't want to see where this goes*, before bursting wide open with the punchline: *said nobody!* It's just another example of the band members trying to make each other laugh and ending up with something special.

"Brad was driving the van and I was in the passenger seat," says Matthew (they've since upgraded to a tour bus). "Trevor was between us with a little guitar we have, and Brad was just being funny, making up stuff as he was driving and trying not to be bored. I think he actually said the first couple lines of the song and went, 'Said nobody!' expecting us to be like 'That's the dumbest thing ever,' but we were like 'That's pretty cool, man.'"

That was also the case with their album title. *Meat and Candy* was never RCA's first choice, once again full of sarcasm and a "That's what *she* said" level of seriousness. With a suggestively posed woman on the cover surrounded by odd combinations of savory and sweet, it might remind some fans of the '90s—this time, perhaps, Blink 182's sexy/strange *Enema of the State* artwork.

"It definitely has that vibe to it, but it really is about the songs that are on there," Matthew says with a grin. "When we sat down to pick songs for the album, we were talking about what else we wanted, and said, 'It looks like we've got a lot of ear candy, we need some meat in there, too.' Shane McAnally just threw it out there, like 'You should call it *Meat and Candy*.' And we all got wide-eyed and were like 'That's exactly what we're gonna call it.'"

"Shane said somebody from the label texted him one day and said '*Meat and Candy*, really?'" Matthew continues proudly. "And he said, 'That's exactly the reaction they want.'" ■

ON THE ROAD



Night Moves

Nash Country Weekly
spends a day on the road
with **FRANKIE BALLARD**
and discovers that it all
comes down to the show.

FRANKIE BALLARD is not a morning person.

"I'm one of those guys who will just sit at the end of the bed and just stare into the corner for 20 minutes before I even really do anything," says the "Sunshine & Whiskey" singer, adding with a laugh, "I'm just kind of pissed off about being awake."

Fortunately, it was later in the day when *Nash Country Weekly* caught up with the Battle Creek, Mich., native at a recent stop on Florida Georgia Line's Anything Goes Tour at the Xfinity Center in Mansfield, Mass., where Frankie was in excellent spirits preparing to open the show for a sellout crowd. The singer/songwriter and guitarist has had his coffee and breakfast and is ready to rock. "I try to get some protein in me: yogurt, oatmeal, eggs or some kind of protein shake," Frankie explains. "I find that it gives you more energy in the middle of the day when it's hardest for me to eat because I'm usually pretty busy."

But before he and his four-man band—drummer Ross Webb, keyboard player Billy Justineau, bass player Robbie Harrington and guitarist Eddie Robinson—can take the stage for a blistering five-song set, Frankie has to navigate a jam-packed show-day schedule.

First, there is an intimate pre-show concert for contest winners sponsored by Mike's Hard Lemonade. He and Eddie joke and chat with fans while running through lovely acoustic versions of the three No. 1 hits from his 2014 sophomore album, *Sunshine & Whiskey*—the title track, along with "Helluva Life" and "Young & Crazy." A lengthy meet-and-greet with fans finds Frankie taking a moment to chat and pose for a

STORY BY
SARAH
RODMAN

PHOTOS BY
TIM
BUGBEE





From the moment Frankie Ballard steps off his tour bus in his “Canadian tuxedo,” he’s on the go—performing a private concert for contest winners and signing autographs. (Below) Frankie and songwriter Lori McKenna look to ice cream for writing inspiration.



FRANKIE BALLARD CONTINUED

photo with each. A quick look at gear in the trailer leads to a brief but raucous soundcheck that includes everything from hard-rock guitar riffs to keyboard player Billy dashing off a snippet of the buoyant bossa nova classic “The Girl From Ipanema.” There is an interview and a photo shoot, where Frankie jokingly bemoans that he has chosen to wear a “Canadian tuxedo,” referring to his denim jacket-and-jeans combo. Then it is on to a session with local radio station WKLB.

Because of those numerous and

varied obligations, Frankie doesn’t normally write songs on the road. Today he is making a rare exception to devote three hours to a session with Lori McKenna, a Massachusetts native who lives nearby and has co-written hits like Hunter Hayes’ “I Want Crazy,” RaeLynn’s “God Made Girls” and the Little Big Town smash “Girl Crush.”

“On the road it’s all about execution: When are we loading in? When are we setting up? When are we soundchecking? And then it’s executing the show and then we’re entertaining people and the band is rocking and here’s a guitar



solo and woo!” he blurts in a tumble of words, explaining the buzz of show days. “[The touring routine is] not a creative head space, and writing, of course, is a super-creative place you’ve got to be in and so it’s hard for me to shake that off.”

Frankie made an effort to shake it off today, he says, “Because I love Lori McKenna. It was just such a special opportunity and I’ve been trying to do it for so long and so I said, ‘Let’s do it,’ and I’m glad I did.” (Later, backstage, Lori—a Ballard fan—reports that she and Frankie were able to put together a verse



Before Florida Georgia Line takes the stage on their headlining Anything Goes Tour stop at the Xfinity Center in Mansfield, Mass., Frankie works the crowd into a frenzy with his guitar chops and rock-influenced vocals.



and chorus they were happy with, and that they hope to finish the song.)

Frankie is well aware that the rigorous demands he now faces as an artist with three chart-topping songs are preferable to the idle time on the hands of an artist struggling to break through.

"I started trying to do what I'm doing right now, which is have a little bit of momentum, have some songs on the radio, 11 years ago," he says. "Having some things come to light and some things crossed off the list and three No. 1 songs, it's like, 'Wait a second, man, this is what I've been trying to do!' That feeling is so

incredible that being busy is fun, too."

By the time he lays his head down in his bunk on the bus, says Frankie, it's usually lights out. But to pass the time on the road, he and the band dive into movies, concert films and music documentaries. "We have the history of music in DVD on the bus—rock 'n' roll gigs or old country gigs or The Rolling Stones." And if he's not steeping himself in movies or music, Frankie is eager to watch educational programming.

"If there's no movies on then I'll go to the Science Channel, Discovery Channel or PBS. I've got to be learn-

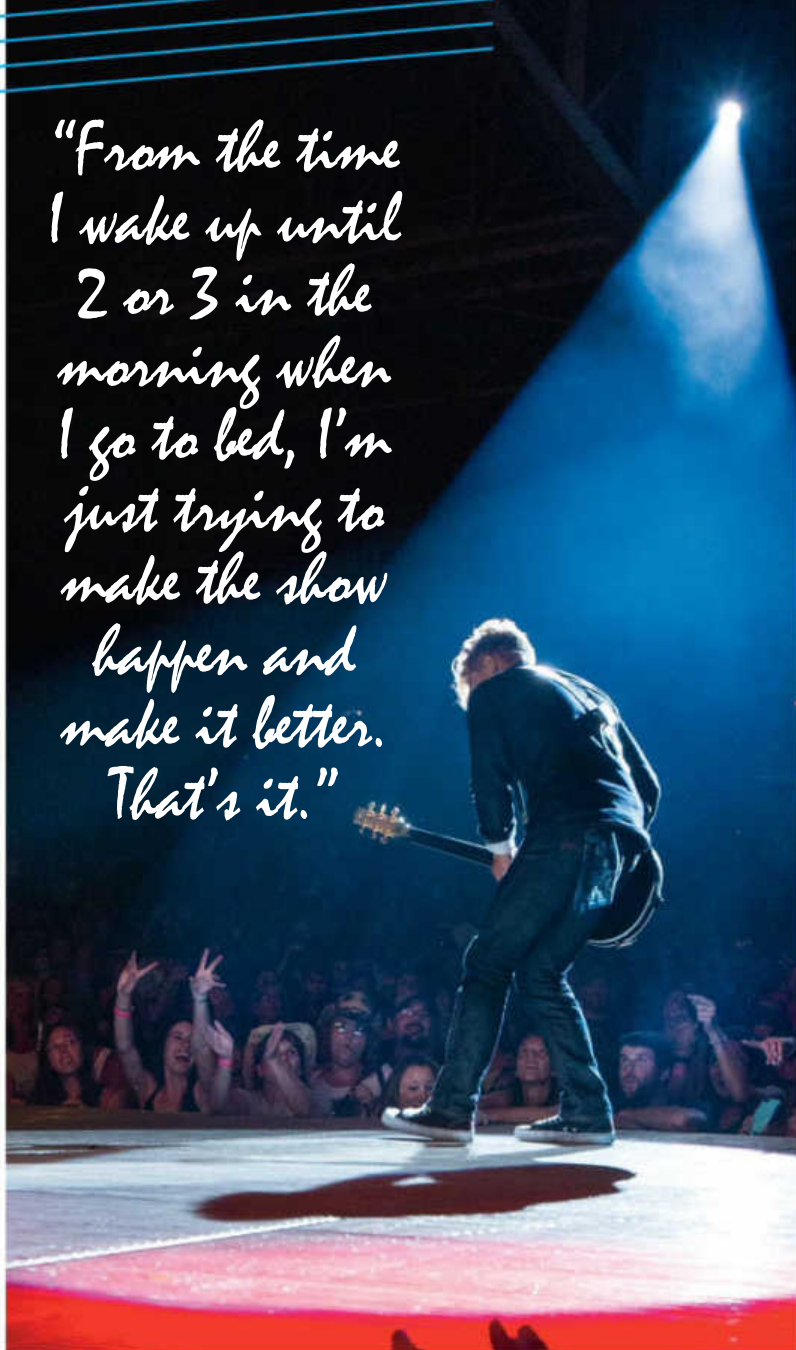
ing something," he says, citing *How It's Made* as a favorite.

Ruminating on his current life toggling between the FGL gigs—where he performs on a bill with the hit duo and fellow opener Thomas Rhett—and his own headlining shows at clubs, festivals, and fairs, Frankie says he truly only has one directive.

"What I would want people to know about a day on the road with Frankie Ballard is summed up best, I think, this way: From the time I wake up until 2 or 3 in the morning when I go to bed, I'm just trying to make the show happen and



"From the time I wake up until 2 or 3 in the morning when I go to bed, I'm just trying to make the show happen and make it better. That's it."



FRANKIE BALLARD CONTINUED

make it better. That's it. I don't go play golf. If I'm working out or something in the afternoon that's because I need to be in shape to put on a great show, and that's all I do and it's all I've been doing forever, it seems like," he says. "It's just, 'What do I need to do to get better?'"

All that hard work pays off at showtime. Frankie takes a moment with his band and then a quiet moment for himself as the lights go down. And then the guys hit the stage and blaze through their 25 minutes in a blur. Most of the crowd members are already packing the amphitheatre, waving their

arms, grooving to Frankie's stinging guitar licks and heartily singing along to "Sunshine & Whiskey," reaching out to slap his outstretched hand as he prowls the stage, exuding cool.

His style is his own, but Frankie definitely takes inspiration from heroes like fellow Michigander and Rock and Roll Hall of Famer Bob Seger—for whom Frankie has had the pleasure of opening—and a certain Aussie superstar.

"Of the upper-echelon current contemporary country dudes, I would say Keith Urban [is a role model]," says Frankie, who has finished recording the follow-up to *Sunshine & Whiskey* but

has yet to set a release date. "That's a gig that will last forever because it's built on a guy who can step up to the plate with a bunch of talent [and] a bunch of hit songs, shred the guitar, sing his butt off and truly be a charismatic rock star. Whenever his career plateaus he will maintain altitude for so much longer, and that's really the career I want to have. I want to play as big of rooms as I can ever play. If I can go to Wembley Stadium and play to 90,000 people and it says Frankie Ballard out on the marquee? I'm in! I'll be at soundcheck!"

Just don't schedule it for first thing in the morning. **NCW**

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GOOD & "GONE"

CRAIG MORGAN
GETS OUT OF
HIS COMFORT
ZONE TO
RECORD HIS
NEW ALBUM.



Craig enjoys a sit-down at home with his children (from left) Wyatt, Aly and Jerry, joined by four-legged family member Sam.



Cameras may follow Craig through the wilderness for his Outdoor Channel show, but hunting—a favored leisure pursuit—is “life as usual” for the country star.

CRAIG MORGAN HAS A LOT ON HIS PLATE AT THE MOMENT.

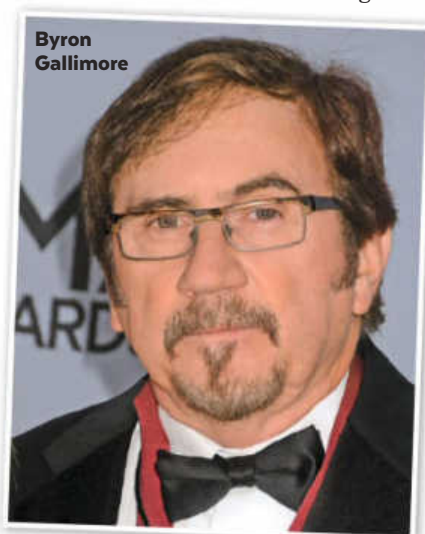
In addition to playing shows and taping episodes of his Outdoor Channel show *Craig Morgan: All Access Outdoors*, his new single has just been released to country radio and his new album is nearing completion. On a sunny fall afternoon, he’s excited to discuss the new tune, “When I’m Gone,” and talk about stretching himself artistically.

Asked what made him want to record the song, Craig doesn’t hesitate in his reply. “I loved the melody right off the bat,” he says, “and the very first line had me: *My last breath, I want to take with a smile*. I’m hoping, like the song says, when I’m not here anymore, I hope that’s how people remember me, with a smile on my face and loving every minute of my life, my wife, my kids, my family, my country. And, hopefully, I will have been a positive influence to everybody. That’s what this song is about and I hope when people hear it, if they’re feeling down, I hope it encourages them to be grateful and try to be a little more positive and realize how fortunate we are.”

“When I’m Gone” falls in line with previous releases from Craig like “Almost Home” and “That’s What I Love About Sunday,” in terms of its spiritually searching content. Such lyrics make for a more substantial message when compared to the

plethora of beer-chuggin’, cutoffs-wearin’ and moonshine-swillin’ country songs that are dominating the airwaves these days, but soundwise, it fits in with those contemporary releases. Craig credits producer Byron Gallimore (Tim McGraw, Faith Hill, Sugarland), with whom he had not previously worked, for being able to pull off this balancing act.

“I want there to be something in



that song,” Craig explains. “And I wanted to record music that was relevant. Country radio is a little different than it was when ‘Redneck Yacht Club’ came out [in 2005]. So, that’s why Byron and I worked together. I had to get outside my comfort zone and we did, and I feel like we did something we’ve never done before.”

In fact, at Byron’s urging Craig did

some things that he had never done before—like letting the producer choose the musicians who would record on the project. “Normally,” Craig admits, “I would be a big part of that, but I knew I had to get a little uncomfortable for this to be different. Yet, because I know who I am, I knew that those threads of who I am in the music [from the] past would carry into the music now.”

There is no definite release date for the project just yet, but NCW staffers got to hear a sneak preview of his new music during a recent visit. The songs, like the gospel-tinged “Country Side of Heaven” and the sultry, soulful “A Whole Lot More to Me,” show some never-before-seen sides of Craig. He’s hoping to have it out sometime in 2016. “I’ve got one more session booked,” he says. “I wrote a song and they want me to go in and cut it for this album, so we’re going to go in and cut two more songs.”

Of course, when Craig can get a break from his many work obligations, he goes hunting—or, as he puts it, “life as usual.” He has a busy schedule, sure, but complaining about it is a foreign concept to the country star.

“Someday people aren’t going to want to hear my music,” he says, in his usual self-deprecating manner. “So, we’re taking advantage of it.”

TAMMY RAGUSA

HEAR THEM ROAR

STORY BY JON FREEMAN

**MIRANDA
LAMBERT** puts
together an
all-female tour
lineup of epic
proportions.



It's an unusually warm and humid fall night in Huntsville, Ala., with a hint of rain lingering in the air. Tucked behind security fencing at the city's Von Braun Center, among state-of-the-art buses and assorted service vehicles, is a tiny vintage camper that goes by the no-nonsense name of Wanda the Wanderer.

That is where Miranda Lambert

likes to hang out when she's on tour. Inside, Miranda fusses with a scuffed-up iPod shuffle that's been pumping out The Rolling Stones and other classic-rock gems through speakers that face a makeshift covered patio outside the trailer. Wanda's interior looks like something an Anthropologie purchaser dreams about—vibrant, colorfully patterned throws and cushions butt up against

the aesthetic of mid-century Americana. Miranda—sporting black leather hot pants, a sleeveless Dolly Parton shirt and silver boots—pulls up a cube-shaped cushion and immediately strikes a wistful tone.

"We only have two more week-ends so I feel sad," she admits. "It's almost like it's too quick. But it makes it sweet, too. It leaves us wanting more."

photo by Joseph Llanes



(From left)
Clare Dunn,
Miranda,
Courtney Cole
and Raelynn



Patty Loveless (left) surprised fans by singing with Miranda on a couple of Roadside Bars dates.

MIRANDA LAMBERT CONTINUED

This iteration of Miranda's Roadside Bars and Pink Guitars Tour (she originally conceived of it in 2009) is particularly noteworthy in that the entire bill is comprised of female performers, like a country version of Lilith Fair. At the Huntsville show, RaeLynn, Clare Dunn and Courtney Cole are warming up the crowd, while Ashley Monroe has appeared on other dates (including a weekend when the Pistol Annies reunited and Patty Loveless came out to sing). One could possibly argue that Miranda would have been able to play bigger venues by adding a mid-level male star to the tour, but that would be missing the point entirely.

"It's not always been all females—we did it before with different male

"I WANT TO DO IT AGAIN. I'LL DO IT A HUNDRED MORE TIMES AND BRING OUT A HUNDRED MORE FEMALE PERFORMERS."

artists," reminds Miranda. "We kept rotating different friends of mine that were male artists, and they came out. But this time it felt like I really needed to do a strong female thing because we need more women in country music."

Still, this tour is groundbreaking in the sense that there haven't been many previous examples of female solidarity in country music tours.

Jana Kramer and Kelsea Ballerini joined forces for the CMT Next Women of Country Tour earlier this year, and back in 2001 Reba McEntire spearheaded the Girls' Night Out Tour with Martina McBride, Sara Evans, Jamie O'Neal and Carolyn Dawn Johnson. This year it feels especially meaningful, following the "Tomatogate" kerfuffle caused by a radio consultant's clunky boys-are-lettuce-girls-are-to-

Miranda: Jeff Nader/Tune PR; airstream photos & Miranda with Patty: courtesy Shopkeeper; Nader; Miranda: CMA by Larry Busacca/Getty Images; PA: courtesy Miranda Lambert Instagram; Courtney: by Marc Nader/BBG/Un Press; Clare by Beth Ridgeway/HeartMedia Huntsville

PISTOL ANNIES REUNITE

DURING A TRIO OF SHOWS early in the Roadside Bars and Pink Guitars Tour, Miranda surprised and delighted fans by bringing Pistol Annie's bandmate Angaleena Presley out to sing with her and Ashley Monroe. They hadn't performed in public since their rather abrupt tour cancellation in 2013.

"We hadn't sung together in like two years onstage, because we all made records," Miranda says. "Angaleena's little boy is in first grade. Ashley got married. Like, everybody was just busy with life and we always said Annie's is supposed to be fun and convenient. We're not gonna make it like something that adds to our stress levels because the reason we started it was to be fun."

That camaraderie returned quickly, and fan videos of the performances showed the trio dancing giddily through verses of "Hell on Heels" and "Hush Hush."

"It definitely inspired us, though. We all got chills onstage when the crowd was singing 'Hell on Heels' back to us. We're already looking at our calendars, planning a trip to the mountains to go write some more music. Like, 'We have to do this!'"



Courtney Cole does a little pickin' and grinnin'. (Right) Clare Dunn goes for the wind-blown look.



matoes salad analogy. The chart data speak to the need for such tours: other than Miranda and Carrie Underwood, Kelsea Ballerini is the only female to hit No. 1 in 2015. Maddie & Tae managed it at the tail end of 2014 with "Girl in a Country Song." And that's pretty much it.

In July 2015, Miranda dominated a few news cycles when news of her divorce from Blake Shelton broke. It's the kind of personal turmoil that has stalled or derailed many careers, but Miranda seems to have emerged on the other side just fine. While the marriage may have had the short-term benefit of raising her profile, Miranda already had a long-established sense of her artistic identity and pattern of risk taking that endeared her to critics and fans alike.

So at present, Miranda is still—along with Carrie Underwood—at the top of the pyramid for female country artists, evidenced by her recent nomination for CMA Entertainer of the Year. She arrived at this point slowly and steadily, releasing several singles that missed their mark before the hits started coming. As such, she sees this Roadside Bars and Pink Guitars Tour as a crucial way to help other female artists make strides toward their own award nominations and televised performances.

"It's just important to me, and all these girls are friends of mine," says Miranda, who will support Kenny Chesney's tour next summer. "I want to do it again. I'll do it a hundred more times and bring out a hundred

more female performers. It's important and we have to lift each other up. Out here, too, all of us hang out every night and get ready together."

Opener Courtney Cole—an independent artist who just signed a big publishing deal—confirms that the ladies are getting to spend a lot of time together.

"[Miranda's] like, 'It's a slumber party out here!'" she says. "We got our nails done the other day. We were getting our nails done and sharing a bag of Cheetos. It was amazing!"

Singer/songwriter/guitarist Clare Dunn proudly shows off the single painted fingernail that remains from that mani/pedi day. ("The guitars wreaked havoc on my manicure, but it's OK," she says.) Though her single, "Move On," is starting to gain

MIRANDA LAMBERT CONTINUED
a little traction on country radio, the Colorado native is still largely unknown in the grand scheme of things. Tours like this one with Miranda offer invaluable exposure to a hungry audience as well as an up-close tutorial on what it takes to achieve Miranda levels of success.

"The truest form of who you are as an artist is always the best approach," muses Clare. "[Miranda's] been an artist who has stuck to her guns and knows who she is and

believes in what she's doing and has a vision and sees the whole thing."

Spunky RaeLynn—the youngest of the bunch at 21—vocalizes what seems to be the central focus of this tour: to introduce fans to new artists—or, in her case, introduce *her* to other artists.

"Miranda just put such an amazing girl-power tour together where we can actually see other artists that I didn't even know have been in Nashville for awhile," says RaeLynn, whose debut single, "God Made Girls," cracked the

Top 10. "I didn't know much about Clare Dunn and Courtney Cole, but they're so amazingly talented and this has been such a great opportunity for us because we can all bond and share our music together."

Later in the evening, each of the four ladies presents at least one musical instance where she directly connects with the tour's overarching theme of feminine strength. Opener Courtney, backed only by an acoustic guitar and cajon, thumbs her nose at the polite behavior unfairly expect-

MIRANDA'S TOUR de FORCE

COURTNEY COLE

Hometown: Mandeville, La.

Single: "Drunk"

In Miranda's Words: "She'll get in her car with her guitar and go anywhere, no matter how far it is. She's so positive. You see her and she has a smile on her face, all day every day, no matter how far she drove. She's just so excited to be out here. I don't know that at this point in my career if I could go back to traveling that way and have that good of an attitude about it. She gets out there every night and gets the crowd going, and she just gives it her everything and I just appreciate that so much about her."

RAELYNN

Hometown: Baytown, Texas

Single: "For a Boy"

In Miranda's Words: "Rae is just so confident in who she is. She's my little sister so I'm just so proud of her and seeing how much she's grown and how she takes control backstage. She's now the boss and has her band and crew. She's healthy and happy and I just love seeing her grow into a woman. It makes me happy."

CLARE DUNN

Hometown: Two Buttes, Colo.

Single: "Move On"

In Miranda's Words: "She's such a seasoned performer. She works her tail off. And she's such a good guitar player. It makes me want to crawl under a rock and take guitar lessons for a year and come back out. Just being so confident in herself, but just straight-up rock 'n' roll grunge. Like, 'All right, I gotta get up there and bring my sh*t tonight!'"



Courtney, RaeLynn, Miranda & Clare by Joseph Llanes; Miranda perf by Joseph Llanes; RaeLynn perf by Beth Ridgeway/HeartMedia Huntsville



Miranda reaches out to greet a young fan. (Left) RaeLynn rocks the mic during her set.



ed of women in “Ladylike” and nods at quasi-feminist hero Shania Twain with a mashup of “Any Man of Mine” and Queen’s “We Will Rock You.” Clare subverts expectations with her slashing guitar work, juxtaposing the harder textures of songs like “Move On” and “Tuxedo” against the yearning vulnerability of their lyrics. She also covers Bob Seger as well as uber-male Led Zeppelin and recasts their tunes as something new. RaeLynn kicks off her set with “Boss,” a declaration of empowerment directly descended from Janet Jackson’s “Control.” Between sets, the house speakers play songs exclusively by female artists (except for The Rolling Stones’ “Honky Tonk Women,” of course).

Though she’s the veteran performer of the bunch, Miranda sees her tourmates as peers and learns from them as much as she tries to teach.

“All of them inspire me in different ways,” she says. “I watch their whole shows, every night, all three of them. It makes me feel like, ‘All right, I’m ready to go now.’ They’ve inspired me to get up onstage and do what I do. I hope they can learn from me.”

Miranda’s 90-minute set combines

the many elements of her artistry, leading off with a guns-blazing “Kerosene” and hitting every emotional vista along the way. She swaggers through the self-acceptance anthem “Heart Like Mine”; she quiets the crowd for “The House That Built Me”; and brings out the devastation of “Over You,” which she wrote with ex-husband Blake Shelton. She even pulls out album tracks like “Me and Your Cigarettes” from *Revolution* and “Bring Me Down” from her debut album, *Kerosene*.

With a simple stage setup, understated fabric backdrop and elegant lighting, Miranda lets her songs and performance do the talking. It’s a nod to the rough-and-tumble Texas music scene that still informs her sense of how to work a crowd even in large arenas.

“That’s what I saw as performing, was just these dudes in clubs playing their hearts out, sweating,” she says. “That’s sort of why I’m doing it this way right now. I wanted to feel like that and have [general admission], no chairs up front, no thrusts, no ego risers, nothing like that. I sort of wanted it to feel like it’s a big

ol’ club and that’s what it is. We’ve had at least two or three catfights every single night of this tour—which makes me happy!”

There is no catfighting between the members of this tour, however. They carry on like old friends, laughing and singing along to Top 40 hits during a pre-show photo shoot. Whatever rivalries may exist between artists working in country music, there don’t seem to be any between these women—only admiration. It’s inspiring to witness a united front that—considering what women in country have faced in the last year or so—is happening at exactly the right time.

“We need to push it to the forefront. I’m so thankful to have this spot,” Miranda says. “I’ve been doing this now for a decade and I feel like I’m just getting started. I’ve been doing nothing but writing songs for the last four months straight. I literally feel like I’m at the beginning. I’m that excited. And I want to share that. I want to create a platform for these other girls to feel that way.”

In 2015, that mattered more than ever for the women of country music. **NCW**



The Lone
Bellow



Chris
Stapleton

PILGRIMAGE TO TENNESSEE

PHOTOS BY TYLER ANDREWS

Willie Nelson, Wilco and Weezer headlined the inaugural Pilgrimage Music & Cultural Festival in Franklin, Tenn., on Sept. 26 and 27. But they weren't the only ones rocking multiple stages on the 200-acre farm. A bevy of other stars brought their A-game, including Sheryl Crow, Chris Stapleton, Steven Tyler, Will Hoge, Band of Horses and more.



Will
Hoge
(right)



Nikki
Lane



Punch
Brothers



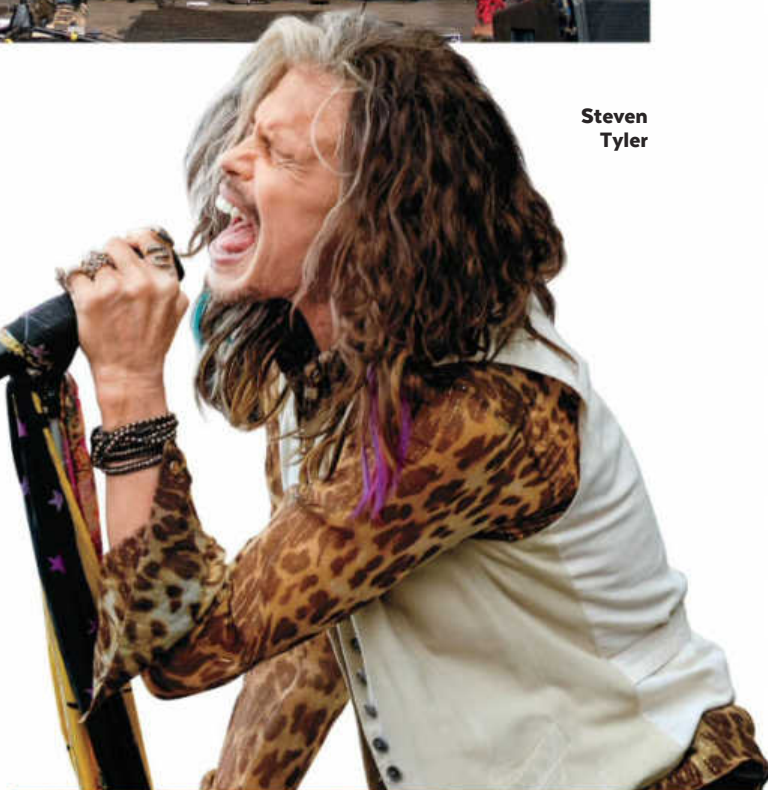
Trampled
by Turtles



Madisen
Ward and the
Mama Bear



John &
Jacob



Steven
Tyler



Holly
Williams



Dawes

GOLDEN



The stars aligned at the Ryman Auditorium for the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band's 50th anniversary showcase in September.

Group stage photo by Glen Rose/The Press House; all other photos by David McClister/The Press House

Technically speaking, the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band doesn't celebrate its 50th anniversary until 2016. But you'll have to forgive them for getting a jump on the festivities. It's not like golden anniversaries roll around very often for bands. Aerosmith? Nope, only 44 years. ZZ

Top? Nope, only 46 years. It's hallowed company when you join the 50-year club alongside groups like The Rolling Stones.

"It's humbling," says singer/guitarist Jeff Hanna, who, along with drummer Jimmie Fadden, founded the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band in 1966 and has been a part of it ever since. "It was always our dream to make

music, but if you had asked us 10 years into our careers if we'd be doing this for 20 more years, let alone 40, we would have laughed you out of the room. But as we've gotten closer to this milestone, we thought, 'Wouldn't it be great—as far as longevity—to have a career like Willie Nelson or Tony Bennett?' We're going down that road. I guess we're

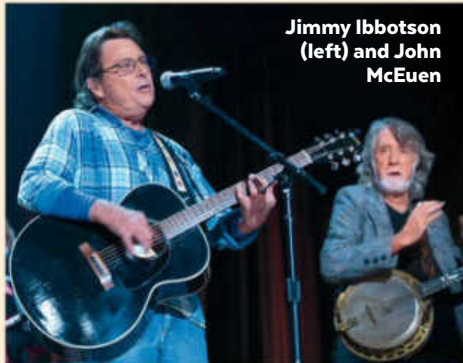
GRIT

The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band celebrates a monumental milestone with a monumental celebration at the Ryman Auditorium.

Sam Bush



Jimmy Ibbotson (left) and John McEuen



Jerry Jeff Walker (left) and John McEuen



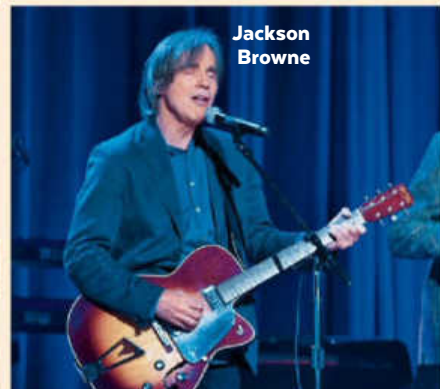
Jeff Hanna (left), Alison Krauss and Rodney Crowell



(From left) Jeff Hanna, Bob Carpenter and Jimmie Fadden



Jackson Browne



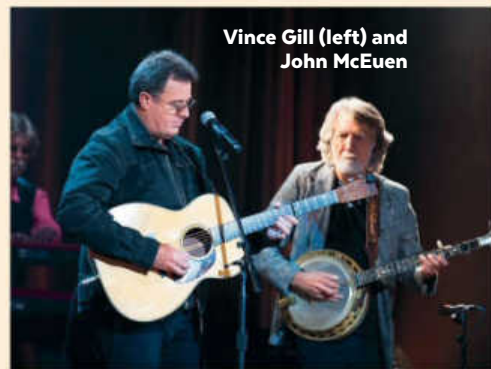
John Prine (left) and John McEuen



Jerry Douglas



Vince Gill (left) and John McEuen



looking at 60 years next.”

To commemorate their 50th anniversary, the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band—known for hits like “Mr. Bojangles” and “Fishin’ in the Dark”—performed a celebratory showcase at Nashville’s Ryman Auditorium in September. The event, which featured special performances from Vince Gill, Alison

Krauss, Jerry Jeff Walker, John Prine, Jackson Browne and more, was taped for PBS and will air on television in March.

“As far as career highlights, we just had it with the Ryman show,” says Jeff. “We’ve had tons of wonderful experiences, like doing the *Will the Circle Be Unbroken* record and being in the studio with Mother


Maybelle Carter and later on with Johnny Cash and the Carter Sisters, Earl Scruggs, Roy Acuff and Doc Watson—you can’t beat those as musical and life experiences—but the Ryman celebration was unbelievable. We’re still buzzing from it. I’m sure we’ll be buzzing until March when it airs.”

JIM CASEY



COUNTRY MUSIC'S
FAVORITE GROUP
RETURNS WITH
ITS FIRST NEW
ALBUM IN NEARLY
15 YEARS—AND
THE GUYS ARE
GLAD TO BE HERE.

Bama's



(From left) Teddy Gentry, Jeff Cook and Randy Owen are tickled to be back in action as Alabama.

N

ever say never. It ain't over 'til it's over. They both apply to the rejuvenation of country's most prolific group, Alabama.

True, founding members Randy Owen, Jeff Cook and Teddy Gentry announced a Farewell Tour in 2002, which ran until the early portion of 2004. It was meant more as a goodbye to extensive touring, with Randy conceding that the guys were simply "exhausted" from years of working the road. But gradually, they worked their way back, starting in 2011 with their Bama Rising concert, benefitting the victims of the devastating tornadoes that hit the band's home state. To celebrate the band's 40th anniversary, the three original members embarked on their Back to The Bowery Tour in 2013, a nod to their early days as the house band for Myrtle Beach club The Bowery. Shows were instant sellouts, prompting Randy and the boys to rethink this whole "get off the road" thing. Maybe traveling wasn't so bad after all.

"We didn't think that people cared as much about us as they did," says Randy, flanked by his cousins Teddy and Jeff inside the office of their Nashville management company. "We went out and started doing shows and they were selling thousands of tickets. It was just a different, wonderful feeling." Teddy chimes in, "It was almost the same mixture of people as far as age groups. We were getting kids, people in their 80s and middle-age fans. That part hadn't changed at all."

So, the band plays on, performing select dates on the road. They've also resumed recording, a door they left open even as they announced their Farewell Tour more than a dozen

STORY BY BOB PAXMAN

Back

With a new album available in Cracker Barrel Old Country Stores, Alabama has again returned to the concert stage.



ALABAMA CONTINUED

years ago. Randy, Jeff and Teddy agreed in 2002 they would consider opportunities to hit the studio and make another album.

It took a few years, but that time has finally arrived. Alabama has released its first album of original songs since 2001's *When It All Goes South*. The new record, *Southern Drawl*, is available at online outlets along with all Cracker Barrel Old Country Store locations.

The guys insist that they had never drawn up a timetable to release new music. This simply seemed like the right time. "It's something that was meant to be," says Randy, sounding almost cosmic in tone. "We were just so glad to be back in the studio."

Fans will recognize the familiar, harmony-driven Alabama sound. But the threesome updated the band's style on a few of the tracks, notably the title tune. "It is a different sound for us," Jeff, still generally the quiet one of the bunch, says. "It's kind of a party song about the Southland."



The song "Southern Drawl" lies in the same thematic territory as Alabama classics like "Tennessee River" and "My Home's in Alabama." Musically, those tunes walk the melodic line between several styles. "Those were country and some Southern rock and almost a bluegrass type of sound, all coming together," Jeff points out. "I played twin guitars on the recording of 'Tennessee River' to give it that Southern-rock feel, kind of like what the Allman Brothers and Lynyrd Skynyrd were doing."

That unique sound, powered by Randy's country-soul lead vocals

and Jeff and Teddy's harmonies and instrumental prowess, created a niche for Alabama. It was the first self-contained band that found overwhelming commercial success in country music. Country history had been replete with popular vocal groups and instrumental bands, but Alabama blended the best of those two worlds. In fact, they were often referred to as country's version of The Beatles. They played every instrument on all of their songs, performed the vocal parts and even wrote many of their own songs. At first, Randy admits, the public wasn't sure what to make of this hybrid of longhaired boys who played country music.

"We were still new to people, and there was this one night when we did 'Tennessee River' and kicked it off with Jeff's guitar and people got up and started dancing," Randy recalls. "Then, Jeff gets out the fiddle and all of a sudden they're all looking at each other, like 'where did *that* come from?' I heard this one lady go, 'That's the

perf. photo by Kevin Winter/Getty Images; Bear by Sporting News/Getty Images; Alabama courtesy RCA

Attack of the Bear

Alabama's first encounter with legendary football coach Bear Bryant didn't go exactly as planned.

"I've got a good Bear Bryant story about the first time we met him," says Randy Owen, as he breaks into a smile. And that's only natural. Somewhere along the way, the state's most famous country band surely had to meet up with the legendary football coach who led Alabama to six National Championships before retiring in 1982.

"It was still early in our careers," Randy begins. "Teddy and I were flying in from Los Angeles and landed in Atlanta. It was about four in the morning. And Bear Bryant was sitting there, asleep at the gate. He was the only one there." Neither was sure why the famed coach was alone at the airport, but they were aware of one important notion: that the Bear probably wouldn't enjoy being riled out of hibernation.

At the same time, how could they pass up this winning opportunity? "We sat down and spoke to him and he got himself up," Randy recalls. "He was a little bleary-eyed. And I



said, 'Coach Bryant, I'm Randy and this is my cousin Teddy. We play in the Alabama band.'" At that, the Bear, in his trademark gravelly drawl, countered with, "I told my players if you ever get on the field again while the game's going on to run over your asses." Bear, apparently still not fully awake, mistakenly thought that Randy and Teddy were introducing themselves as members of the university's marching band.

"That's what he thought," Randy says with a laugh. "We explained who we were and he was very nice after that. But it almost didn't go too well."

worst damn thing I've ever heard.' It was because they couldn't dance to it."

Randy can't help but let out a raspy laugh at the memory. The band was surely smiling in unison when "Tennessee River" became the group's first No. 1 hit in 1980. The nostalgic, feel-good tune also kicked off an incredible string of 21 consecutive No. 1 hits, a feat yet to be matched by any other country act.

While Alabama could deliver the country-rock goods, the band proved that it could slow down the tempo with no loss of fervor. "Feels So Right," "The Closer You Get" and "Love in the First Degree" were straightforwardly romantic tunes with just a hint of foreplay, making them as sensually charged as anything that Conway Twitty was serving up. Fans and radio alike loved them.

The first single from *Southern Drawl*, "Wasn't Through Lovin' You Yet," hearkens back to those earlier tunes. Teddy heard a potential blockbuster upon first listen. "When we were still putting the record togeth-

er," Teddy recalls, "[Randy] told me that he had a song he wanted me to listen to. And that sounded like a hit to me. 'Come Find Me' was another one in that vein that stood out for me, and that's also on this album."

In a light moment, NCW engaged in an inadvertent version of "Stump the Band" when another selection from *Southern Drawl*, "Footstompin' Music," was brought up. Our kudos to Randy on the notion that the song was original, and not a remake of the 1972 hit by Grand Funk Railroad, was met with a curious query.

"You mean, there was *another* song with that name?" Randy, seeming quite concerned over this bit of historical news, asked. "I just don't remember that. We're not gonna get sued, are we?"

At that, Jeff lets go a laugh, which he quickly stifles. "You can't sue over a title," Jeff assures, still smiling over Randy's angst. "Now, if you start copying the lyrics, you got a problem. But you didn't do that." Alabama's song, in fact, was co-written by Randy and

his son. "Well, that's a relief," Randy smiles, leaning towards Jeff. "You remember, we used to do a Grand Funk Railroad song in our shows, 'We're an American Band,' so we liked them. But I really don't remember the 'Footstompin' Music' song." Jeff tries to oblige with a demonstration on air guitar, humming the first part of the opening verse, but to no avail. Randy has been summarily stumped.

Randy's brief interlude of embarrassment is promptly offset as he ponders the release of *Southern Drawl*. He's delighted to have new music and a renewed direction for the band. Though the three original members are all in their 60s, with Randy sporting a thick mane of gray hair, they appear to have discovered the rejuvenation formula.

"We've worked very hard on this album, because we wanted it to stand up against our other work," Randy says. "And it's great that people still want to hear us. That's the most exciting part for us. We're almost feeling young again." **NCW**

FOR THE LOVE

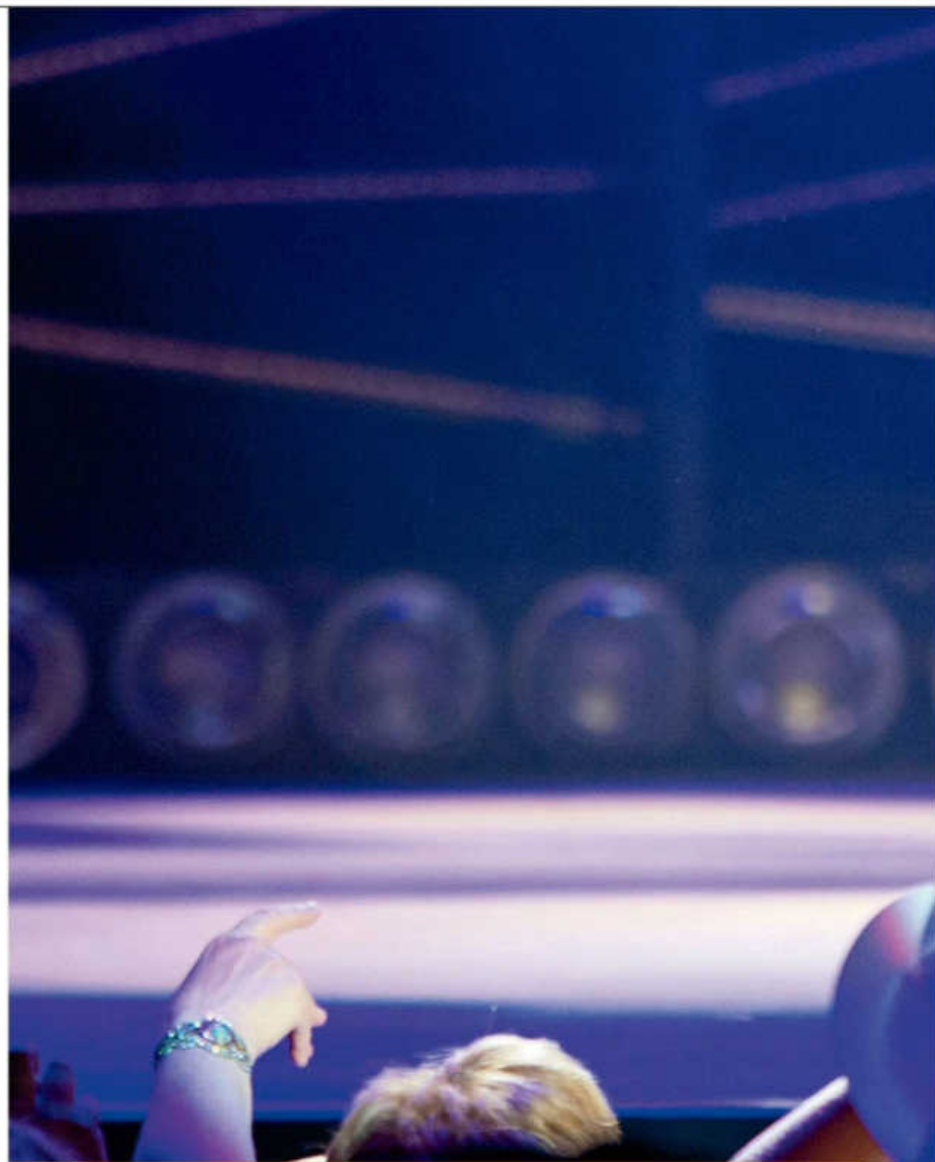
ONE MORNING JIMMY ROBBINS was waiting for Jon Nite and Josh Osborne to arrive at his office near Music Row for a writing appointment, feeling extra eager to get the day rolling.

"It was just one of those rare days where I brought in the title, because I usually don't do that," explains Jimmy. "I do so much of the other stuff with the track, so we try to spread out all the work—so I like to steal other people's titles!"

Josh was the first of the other co-writers to arrive, and Jimmy couldn't wait to share his thoughts. "I just remember asking him, 'Do you think this is worth anything?'" Jimmy recalls, laughing.

Josh was intrigued by Jimmy's title idea, "Top of the World," but he was also concerned about previous uses such as the 1973 hit of the same name by The Carpenters. "That title's been written before, but we were talking about what does that look like in the scheme of a song?" notes Josh. "I loved what he had, though. The music just felt kind of up and positive and optimistic."

While they waited for Jon, the two



"TOP OF THE WORLD"

TIM MCGRAW

WRITERS:



Jimmy Robbins



Josh Osborne



Jon Nite

In 2014, JOSH OSBORNE was added to US-23—the "Country Music Highway"—in Kentucky. The state started the project to honor artists such as Dwight Yoakam, Patty Loveless, Loretta Lynn, Keith Whitley, The Judds and many others who came from the region and found success in country music. At each county line, a sign recognizes the person or people from that county. Josh's name was added in 2014 after he won a Grammy for his Kacey Musgraves hit "Merry Go Round."

started messing around with the idea of singing that particular melody over one of Jimmy's catchy guitar riffs. "It just felt so natural," Josh recalls. "Then we just stumbled up on that cool little *don't know where we're gonna be, but I know we're gonna be*

sitting on top of the world."

By the time Jon arrived, Josh and Jimmy were fired up to share their quickly developing song idea with their co-writer in hopes that he, too, would be on board. "I loved it, of course," says Jon. "I jumped in feet



first, and we were all on the same page from the beginning.”

Having now written the ending part of the song’s chorus, the three writers had to backtrack to find the pieces that would connect to their starting point. “We knew we had our work cut out for us to prevent any boring moments or letting the song down at any moment,” Josh says. “As soon as we landed on it, it was almost a revolution. I love a chorus when parts [of it] come over you like a warm blanket, and I think that

post-chorus does that very thing, because you’ve gone through the theatrics of the high part and then you come out of it into the hook.”

The song’s theme—not having many material possessions but still being “on top of the world” because of love—had Jon pulling from his own personal experience. “My wife reminds me all the time [about] when we were penniless, and I would tell her we could be in a double-wide, and I’d be happy,” he says, smiling. “This song is really a special

one for me because of that.”

The demo for “Top of the World” eventually wound up in the hands of Tim McGraw’s camp and was quickly put on hold for his *Damn Country Music* album. It was then released as the project’s lead single.

“I look back on that day we wrote this and can’t help but smile,” says Jimmy. “It was just another one of those awesome days where I think we were all reminded how fortunate we are to do what we do for a living.”

ALANNA CONAWAY

The week of Oct. 31, 2015

TOP 25 BILLBOARD ALBUMS

TW	LW	TITLE / ARTIST
1	4	KILL THE LIGHTS LUKE BRYAN
2	–	35 MPH TOWN TOBY KEITH
3	–	THIRTY ONE JANA KRAMER
4	2	CASS COUNTY DON HENLEY
5	1	COLD BEER CONVERSATION GEORGE STRAIT
6	3	TANGLED UP THOMAS RHETT
7	5	MONTEVALLO SAM HUNT
8	10	CLOSER (EP) KANE BROWN
9	7	SOUTHERN DRAWL ALABAMA
10	6	JEKYLL + HYDE ZAC BROWN BAND
11	–	SQUELCH JASON BOLAND AND THE STRAGGLERS
12	8	ILLINOIS BRETT ELDREDGE
13	9	THE OUTSIDERS ERIC CHURCH
14	11	START HERE MADDIE & TAE
15	13	PAIN KILLER LITTLE BIG TOWN
16	14	ANYTHING GOES FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE
17	15	OLD BOOTS, NEW DIRT JASON ALDEAN
18	17	JUST AS I AM BRANTLEY GILBERT
19	16	ANGELS AND ALCOHOL ALAN JACKSON
20	–	CHANGE: THE LOST RECORD, VOL- UME 1 (EP) • JOSH THOMPSON
21	20	NOW THAT'S WHAT I CALL COUNTRY, VOLUME 8 • VARIOUS ARTISTS
22	21	IGNITE THE NIGHT CHASE RICE
23	19	ANGELS AMONG US: HYMNS & GOSPEL FAVORITES • ALABAMA
24	25	GREATEST HITS SO FAR ... ZAC BROWN BAND
25	26	THE FIRST TIME KELSEA BALLERINI

TOP 25 BILLBOARD SINGLES

TW	LW	TITLE / ARTIST
1	2	STRIP IT DOWN LUKE BRYAN
2	5	GONNA WANNA TONIGHT CHASE RICE
3	4	ANYTHING GOES FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE
4	6	BREAK UP WITH HIM OLD DOMINION
5	7	LET ME SEE YA GIRL COLE SWINDELL
6	1	LOSE MY MIND BRETT ELDREDGE
7	3	SAVE IT FOR A RAINY DAY KENNY CHESNEY
8	8	SMOKE BREAK CARRIE UNDERWOOD
9	10	NOTHIN' LIKE YOU DAN + SHAY
10	12	I'M COMIN' OVER CHRIS YOUNG
11	11	GONNA BLAKE SHELTON
12	14	GONNA KNOW WE WERE HERE JASON ALDEAN
13	16	BURNING HOUSE CAM
14	15	TOP OF THE WORLD TIM MCGRAW
15	17	STAY A LITTLE LONGER BROTHERS OSBORNE
16	18	RUN AWAY WITH YOU BIG & RICH
17	19	ALREADY CALLIN' YOU MINE PARMALEE
18	21	I GOT THE BOY JANA KRAMER
19	20	DIBS KELSEA BALLERINI
20	22	I LOVE THIS LIFE LOCASH
21	26	DIE A HAPPY MAN THOMAS RHETT
22	27	BREAK UP IN A SMALL TOWN SAM HUNT
23	23	COUNTRY NATION BRAD PAISLEY
24	24	WE WENT RANDY HOUSER
25	25	21 HUNTER HAYES

TOP 10 AMERICANA AIRPLAY

TW	LW	TITLE / ARTIST
1	1	SOMETHING MORE THAN FREE JASON ISBELL
2	2	SERVANT OF LOVE PATTY GRIFFIN
3	3	LOST TIME DAVE ALVIN & PHIL ALVIN
4	4	PANHANDLE RAMBLER JOE ELY
5	7	SERMON ON THE ROCKS JOSH RITTER
6	5	SOUTH BROADWAY ATHLETIC CLUB BOTTLE ROCKETS
7	6	PAGEANT MATERIAL KACEY MUSGRAVES
8	8	GATES OF GOLD LOS LOBOS
9	12	CASS COUNTY DON HENLEY
10	14	HARD TO PLEASE THE BLACK LILLIES

SOURCE: AMERICANA AIRPLAY CHART

rdio TOP 5 TRENDING COUNTRY SONGS*

TW	TITLE / ARTIST
1	BREAK UP IN A SMALL TOWN SAM HUNT
2	BURNING HOUSE CAM
3	STRIP IT DOWN LUKE BRYAN
4	CRUISE FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE
5	DIE A HAPPY MAN THOMAS RHETT

TOP 5 TRENDING COUNTRY/AMERICANA/SOUTHERN ALBUMS*

TW	TITLE / ARTIST
1	THIRTY ONE JANA KRAMER
2	MONTEVALLO SAM HUNT
3	COLD BEER CONVERSATION GEORGE STRAIT
4	GREATEST HITS KEITH WHITLEY
5	35 MPH TOWN TOBY KEITH

*DATA FROM OCT. 19, 2015

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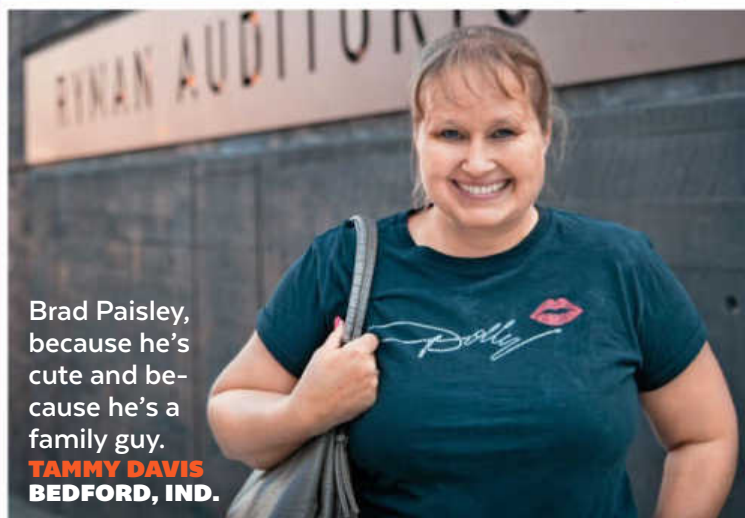
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Who is your country music crush and what do you like about them?



Luke Bryan—because he knows how to tell a story in his music and his life.

MELANIE HANSON | MOORHEAD, MINN.



Brad Paisley, because he's cute and because he's a family guy.

**TAMMY DAVIS
BEDFORD, IND.**



Dolly, of course, and I love her big ... well, back in the day, when she had her big, big hair and a ring on every finger and was larger than life. But I still love her.

**GARNER BYRAM
KNOXVILLE, TENN.**



Sam Hunt, because he's just really cute, he's masculine, he's got the athletic thing, but he's country. He's like the total package. He's a Southern man.

**SABRINA BAILEY
LYNCHBURG, VA.**

Dolly, of course, is my crush since I was 3, and it's because of her larger-than-life personality.

**ROBBIE THOMPSON
RICHMOND, VA.**



My country music crush would have to be Tim McGraw. He's super-fit and a good role model for people trying to get healthy.

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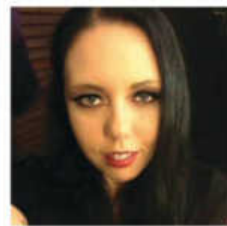
SAM HUNT

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 T O K C A B R E T R A U Q E G E L L O C

BETWEEN THE PINES
 BREAK UP IN A SMALL TOWN
 BROTHER BEN
 BROTHER VAN
 CEDARTOWN, GA
 CMT BREAKTHROUGH VIDEO
 COLLEGE QUARTERBACK
 COME OVER
 COP CAR
 DAD ALLEN
 DANDELION

EX TO SEE
 FARM TOUR
 GUITAR
 HOUSE PARTY
 HUNTING
 LEAVE THE NIGHT ON
 LIPSTICK GRAFFITI TOUR
 LOVE SOMEBODY
 MAKE YOU MISS ME
 MCA NASHVILLE
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 RAISED ON IT
 SONGWRITER
 SPEAKERS
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 UAB GRADUATE
 VANDALIZER
 WE ARE TONIGHT
 WHEELS UP TOUR



Find the words, titles and phrases in this wordsearch challenge submitted by **AMANDA BECICA** of **Villas, N.J.** NOTE—they may appear vertically, horizontally, diagonally, backward or forward. Good luck!

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Joseph Llanes

Centering around themes of exploration, Joseph's work is inspired by the atmosphere surrounding him as a child in Mexico. Looking past the surface, the people and abandoned buildings became a backdrop for the classic style of portraiture he photographs today.



Tim Bugbee

Based out of Boston, Tim Bugbee is an internationally published photographer whose work is produced at concerts ranging from dark and dingy clubs to stadia more suited to sporting events.



Sarah Rodman

Sarah Rodman is a staff pop music and TV critic at the *Boston Globe*. She inherited her love of country music from her mama and has been contributing stories to *Nash Country Weekly* since 2012.



Christopher Parton

Chris Parton is a freelance journalist living in Nashville. He's been covering country music since 2008 and is also a contributor to *Rolling Stone Country* and *Nashville Scene*.

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RUNNING MAN

Singer/songwriter **JACKSON BROWNE** was a member of the **NITTY GRITTY DIRT BAND** for a few months in 1966 before embarking on a solo career. Over the years, Jackson has written a slew of hits, including "Doctor My Eyes," "Take It Easy" and "Running on Empty," a tune that fueled Forrest Gump's tank as he ran across the country in the 1994 Oscar-winning movie.



BASE BALLARD

FRANKIE BALLARD

played baseball for Western Michigan University, but he's not the only country crooner who swung for the fences in college. **DAVID NAIL** took a few cuts at Nashville's Aquinas College, while **FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE**'s **BRIAN KELLEY** had a short stint at Florida State University before transferring to Nashville's Belmont University.



Pen & Tell It

LYLE LOVETT and **ROBERT EARL KEEN** were neighbors during their years at Texas A&M in College Station, Texas, in the late '70s. According to a recent Robert Earl anecdote, Lyle was pedaling by his house on a bicycle one day as he was writing "The Front Porch Song." Lyle liked the new tune-in-progress so much that he went home and penned the final verse. Both men released versions of the song on their debut solo albums.

ROLL CALL

During their 1984 *Billboard* No. 1 hit "Roll On (Eighteen Wheeler)," **ALABAMA** sings "roll on" **46** times, while "eighteen-wheeler" gets **11** shoutouts.

"I have some of the greatest male friends in the business, too. I was just with **DIERKS [BENTLEY]**, who came and gave me my star on the [Music City] Walk of Fame the other day. I was married to a male artist.

I have some of the greatest friends. I'm going out [on tour] with **KENNY [CHESNEY]** next year. I think it's all a family, but definitely having all these girls [on the Roadside Bars and Pink Guitars Tour] feels really special."

MIRANDA LAMBERT



GIVEN DOMINION

Four of the five members of the band **OLD DOMINION** went to college in Virginia. The state nickname of Virginia is "Old Dominion," a moniker that derives from it being the first—and oldest—English royal colony.



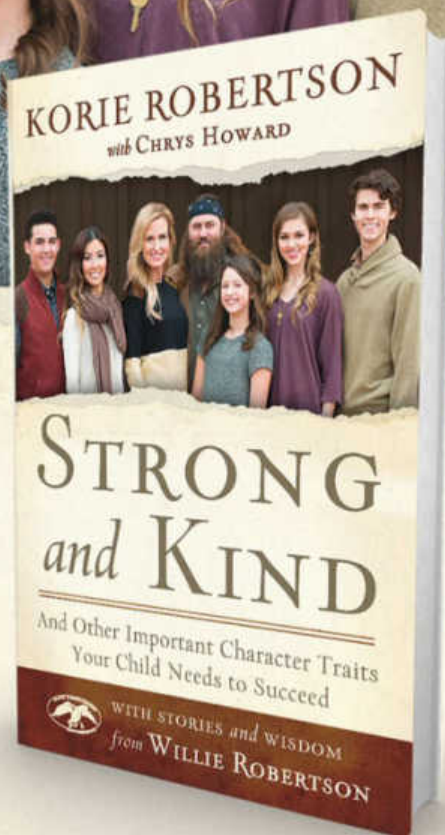
IT'S NEVER BEEN MORE IMPORTANT TO TEACH YOUR CHILDREN WELL.



Many parents want to see positive character traits in their children but wonder how to instill them. As stars of the hit reality-TV show *Duck Dynasty*, Korie and Willie Robertson receive loads of letters and messages from fans asking how they've raised such good kids. As they will tell you, "it isn't always easy, but raising kids with good character is possible."

In *Strong and Kind*, Korie Robertson—with the help of her mom, Chrys Howard, and with insights and stories from her husband, Willie—introduces nine character traits that children need in order to lead a successful life.

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